

**CAMPAIGN CHAOS**  
FRED BARNES • JAY COST  
STEPHEN F. HAYES • P.J. O'ROURKE  
MICHAEL WARREN

the weekly

# Standard

AUGUST 10, 2015

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## THE GUNS OF AUGUST 1990

Saddam's invasion and its consequences

BY VANCE SERCHUK



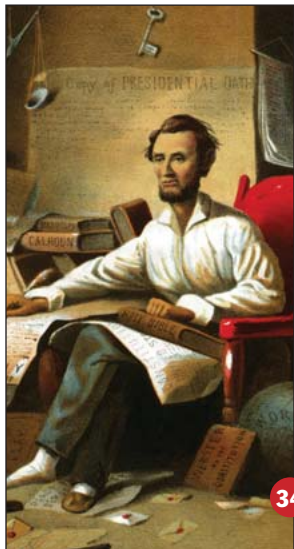
A Kuwaiti prays near a burning oil field outside Kuwait City.

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# Contents

August 10, 2015 • Volume 20, Number 45



- 2 The Scrapbook *Rogues' gallery, rocket science, & more*  
5 Casual *David Skinner, father interrupted*  
6 Editorials *Demand the Documents • A Pro-Life Opportunity •  
Fuel on the Fire • Blaming Israel First*

## Articles

- 11 Down But Not Out **BY STEPHEN F. HAYES**  
*Christie's formula: patience, confidence, more patience*  
14 Solution in Search of a Problem **BY MICHAEL WARREN**  
*Will the new debate format really affect the 2016 result?*  
15 Why They Like Him **BY JAY COST**  
*The Republicans' principal-agent problem*  
17 How to Shrink the Economy **BY FRED BARNES**  
*Follow Hillary's 'growth' prescription*  
18 They Hate Your Guts **BY P.J. O'ROURKE**  
*Democrats and their voters*  
20 Fixing the Court **BY TERRY EASTLAND**  
*Priority number one for the next president?*  
21 Dangerous Apathy **BY WESLEY J. SMITH**  
*Barbarism in our time*  
23 Putinformation **BY LEON ARON**  
*Russian propaganda in the age of postmodernism*

## Features

- 25 The Guns of August 1990 **BY VANCE SERCHUK**  
*A quarter-century after the invasion of Kuwait, we still haven't learned the right lessons*  
30 Consistently Wrong **BY MAX BOOT**  
*The president's happy talk and sad results*

## Books & Arts

- 34 Emancipation Strategy **BY RICHARD STRINER**  
*The ushering-out of the Peculiar Institution*  
36 Defender of Fidel **BY RONALD RADOSH**  
*No dictator is a hero to his bodyguard*  
38 Fear Itself **BY JOHN CHECK**  
*The art of sharing the stage with dread*  
39 Poet in Embryo **BY JAMES MATTHEW WILSON**  
*Old Possum's formative years*  
41 An Adriatic Dream **BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ**  
*Metaphorical drama for the 20th century*  
43 Strange Bedfellows **BY JOE QUEENAN**  
*Human-android love is a nonstarter—period*  
44 Parody *Joe vs. Donald: the contest of the century*

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## Selective Outrage

It's too soon to tell whether the world will be able to recover from its grief, but we suppose civilization must go on, if for no other reason than to preserve the memory of the deceased. We speak, of course, of the tragic killing of Cecil the Lion—the beloved symbol of Zimbabwe's wildlife. To be abundantly clear, THE SCRAPBOOK abhors the illegal or gratuitous killing of animals. Walter Palmer, the Minneapolis dentist who shot the lion, had previously been fined and put on probation for lying about shooting a black bear miles outside the area where his hunting permit was valid. We are not inclined to give him any benefit of the doubt.

Nonetheless, the condemnation of Palmer not only is over-the-top but says a lot about our inability to channel outrage and otherwise have a collective sense of moral priorities. Palmer's dental practice is closed for the time being. His home address is all over the Internet, and he is besieged by death threats. Daytime TV host Sharon Osbourne tweeted, "I hope that #WalterPalmer loses his home, his practice & his money. He has already lost his soul." All of those things may yet happen to Palmer,

but we're not ready to join the gang that looks forward to his two children ending up impoverished. The condemnation is also a little rich coming from Mrs. Osbourne. Her famous heavy-metal husband, Ozzy, is notorious for biting the heads off of two doves—symbols of peace!—to intimidate a couple of recording industry execs. She's bragged about the stunt for decades.

Much of the media coverage has been indistinguishable from the bloodlust of the online mob. Piers Morgan, perhaps auditioning for a job with ISIS, wrote the following in the *Daily Mail*:

I'd like to introduce a new sport—Big Human Hunting. I will sell tickets for \$50,000 to anyone who wants to come with me and track down fat, greedy, selfish, murderous businessmen like Dr Palmer in their natural habitat. . . . Then we'd calmly walk over, skin him alive, cut his head from his neck, and [take] a bunch of photos of us all grinning inanely at his quivering flesh.

Oh, and in case you're wondering about the political fallout: "JUST IN: Cecil the lion killer Walter Palmer donated to Romney," reports the *Hill*.

Sadly, other male lions don't take well to the offspring of dead lions, so Cecil's progeny may not live much longer. "Infanticide is the most likely outcome," an Oxford wildlife researcher told the *Telegraph*. The media have been especially outraged by the fate of the lion cubs, even as they eschew coverage of actual, you know, human infanticide, following the recent revelations of Planned Parenthood's organ harvesting. *Cosmopolitan's* senior political writer Jill Filipovic was both defending Planned Parenthood in *Time* and declaring "Palmer deserves all of the public shaming" inside of a day.

Still, it's hard to top *ThinkProgress* for blowing things out of proportion: "Killing a single lion in 2015 is mathematically equivalent to murdering 400,000 of the planet's roughly eight billion people." Palmer may have committed crimes he has to answer for, but we're confident genocide isn't one of them. While we're counting, it might be worth mentioning South Africa is hosting three million Zimbabwean refugees—but the only crisis in Zimbabwe that's garnering wall-to-wall outrage isn't a humanitarian one. ♦

## Rogues' Gallery

A reader writes to ask about the photo we've been using in our subscription ads (see the back cover of this week's edition, or last week's, for that matter). Is it real, he wonders, or Photoshopped to show the three men together? "If it is an actual photo, it certainly is very interesting: three young men with impressive careers before them. All three were warmly dressed and their shoulders appear to touch one another. All three were staring directly toward the

camera. . . . Stalin is almost smiling, the other two not quite so much."

The photo in question—of Stalin,

Lenin, and Kalinin—is real, and honestly cropped. No Stalinist airbrush manipulation in these pages!



*Planning the workers' paradise, 1919*

THE SCRAPBOOK reached out to our friend (and occasional contributor) Ken Jensen for a few more details on the larger original. "It was taken," he told us, "at the 8th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on March 18-23, 1919." The three men in front of the Big Three "were non-entities, Smigla, Schmidt, and Zorin." The men in the middle were the most important. "Soviet president Yakov Sverdlov had

COURTESY OF THE COMINTERN



died on March 16, and Lenin appointed Mikhail Kalinin in his place on March 18.” The larger photo “contains a sort of random sampling of the 312 delegates at the Congress. Among them, only one lived until 1950 and another died of natural causes. The rest were eventually purged. (Not to worry: several of them were rehabilitated later.)”

The 8th Party Congress was held in the midst of the Russian Civil War, which, Ken added, “explains why Trotsky wasn’t in the picture. He was off fighting. The agenda focused on the war and doctrinal and economic matters. Lenin, apparently, was concerned about gaining the support of the ‘middle peasants.’ Also under discussion was the new Communist International.”

The International (“Comintern,” “Third International”) had been established shortly before, at the March 2-6 Congress, in which Trotsky did participate. “The principal topic of discussion,” Ken said, “was the difference between bourgeois democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Sometime after the Comintern Congress, Lenin, Trotsky, and Rakovsky turned the management of the new International over to Grigory Zinoviev. Stalin pushed Zinoviev out of the RCP leadership in 1925 and had him purged in 1936.”

Happily, these evil men are posthumously helping to sell subscriptions to this journal—a better deed than any of them ever did while alive. ♦

## Can't Buy You Immunity

Chaka Fattah (né Arthur Dav-enport), the Democratic congressman who represents part of Philadelphia and its environs, has never been challenged in a primary election. Since he joined the House in 1995, he has never garnered less than 86 percent of the vote in his impregnable district.

Fattah’s modus operandi on the job has been to spread around as much money as possible. Quite a bit of it has gone to education (and, THE SCRAP-



BOOK expects, ultimately to teachers’ unions), particularly through Philadelphia’s CORE program (\$27 million) and the federal GEAR UP program (\$4.5 billion). Other pet projects of his include: NOAA’s educational program (\$32 million), federal funding for the Boys & Girls Clubs of America and Big Brothers Big Sisters (\$78 million), the Manufacturing Extension Program (\$128 million), and various STEM-related programs (\$266 million), among others.

All that money can make some very powerful friends, willing to do favors in return. Last year, the *Philadelphia Daily News* found that “between 2001 and 2012, nonprofits founded or supported by the Philadelphia congress-

man have paid out at least \$5.8 million to his associates, including political operatives, ex-staffers and their relatives.”

Fattah has had access to such sums through his plum committee assignments. As ranking member of the House Appropriations subcommittee on commerce, justice, science, and related agencies, Fattah has considerable influence over what money goes where.

Ironically, some of the money he helped allocate went to the Justice Department, which was disinclined, apparently, to return the favor, indicting him on 29 counts of racketeering, bribery, mail fraud, and other crimes last week.

If something was amiss, as federal prosecutors allege, it probably

shouldn't have taken this long to figure out, considering that the (alleged) crimes date back to 2007. Still, *THE SCRAPBOOK* is hopeful the high-profile indictment of a notably free spender might, just might, make it marginally easier to trim federal spending. ♦

## Rocket Science

Fresh off the triumph of NASA's *New Horizons* mission to Pluto, there was more big space news this week. And it may turn out to be much bigger than our first look at Pluto—a veritable revolution in physics and space travel.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the modern rocket was invented by an American physicist and engineer named Robert Goddard. He theorized that an object could propel itself not by pushing against something—as, say, a propeller does—but by expelling mass. In 1920, he published a paper explaining how rockets could operate in space and one day fly men to the moon.

Goddard's work was roundly mocked. In its infinite wisdom, the *New York Times* pompously announced that "Professor Goddard, with his 'chair' in Clark College . . . does not know the relation of action to reaction. . . . [Goddard] seems to lack the knowledge ladled out daily in high schools." Goddard reacted to the *Times* by pointing out that "every vision is a joke until the first man accomplishes it; once realized, it becomes commonplace."

Needless to say, Goddard was right, both about the *Times*'s short-sightedness and the logic of rocketry: Because every action produces an equal and opposite reaction, the force of a rocket exhausting propellant from its engines can propel it through a vacuum.

This has, hitherto, been the basis for all space travel. It has also limited space travel: The heavier a rocket, the more fuel is required to push it along. A rocket is basically a giant gas tank with an engine at one end and a payload at the other; since fuel ac-

counts for most of the weight, a lot of the fuel pushing the rocket is being used to push the rest of the rocket's fuel. The more fuel a rocket has, the more fuel it needs. The relation isn't one-to-one, but eventually it becomes self-defeating—NASA's rule of thumb is that it costs \$10,000 to put one pound of anything into orbit. It took *New Horizons* nine years to get to Pluto because getting there faster would have been impractically expensive.

So here's the big news: In 2006, a British engineer, Roger Shawyer, announced he'd designed an electromagnetic propulsion system that needed no fuel and needed to expel no mass to propel itself. And everyone laughed, because that would violate one of physics' fundamental principles, the conservation of momentum, which says an object can't move by pushing on itself.

The thrust Shawyer's device could theoretically produce—says *Wired* magazine—could have propelled *New Horizons* to Pluto in just 18 months. Last year, NASA tested Shawyer's design—and, to their astonishment, it worked. But they couldn't explain how, and they hadn't tested it in a vacuum. Many assumed their results were wrong.

A German research group at the Dresden University of Technology performed its own test, in a vacuum; this week they announced the results. And lo and behold, the Shawyer electromagnetic thruster still works.

Dresden's results have been qualified: Mistakes may have been made, the readings may be wrong—and even if they're not, they still can't be explained. Nonetheless, they report: "Our measurements reveal thrusts as expected from previous claims after carefully studying thermal and electromagnetic interferences."

And since no one can explain how it works, *THE SCRAPBOOK* is not even going to try. We'll content ourselves with the pleasure of reporting that we may, indeed, be at the precipice of a new era in space travel, and a new era in physics. Huzzah! ♦



Our favorite ex-planet

## the weekly Standard

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## A Vacation from Modern Parenting

I was in my office, happily encircled by little piles of paper, drafting an article, when real life interrupted.

My wife Cynthia was on the phone. Our sons, she said, had ridden their bicycles—with permission—to the fancy overpriced coffee shop two blocks away to buy caramels. The shop was closed, they found.

So our elder son, Ben, who is 9, decided to go to the 7-11, several blocks away and just beyond the border of what we consider acceptable society for young boys. This Ben did without permission. And without his little brother, Tommy, whom he left, alone, outside the closed coffee shop.

Ben confessed after Cynthia noticed him eating one of those mass-produced snacks he could only have bought at 7-11. (The overpriced coffee shop sells caramels, artisanal chocolate, and a single yuppie-approved brand of potato chip.)

I got the point. Going to 7-11 without permission, bad. Abandoning the 7-year-old, really bad. It actually required almost no effort for Tommy to find his way home, but still. Who knows what could have happened to him?

When I got home that evening, the phone was ringing. The woman on the line sounded uncannily like my mother-in-law, a funny lady who sends people cards on every last rinky-dink holiday but not on Christmas. The care and safety of children, however, brings out her dark side. She asked if I knew what Ben had done. From the sound of her voice, I realized this had to be worse than the 7-11 thing, so I began imagining some later act of cruelty or vandalism, something really horrible that must have followed Ben's notorious trip to a déclassé convenience store. "What did he do?" I asked.

It would be better, she said, if Cynthia told me. But then she choked back

a few tears to ask if she could speak to Ben herself. Fortunately, I did not have to decide this one. Ben wasn't home to talk to her.

Summer is the season of discontent in my house. Everyone goes to bed too late. And what crimes our children would have committed at school often



*Skinner's in summer*

happen in plain sight, on the watch of my dear wife, who works part time from home. Day camps help, but with three kids going this way and that, Cynthia is reduced to taxiing about town, racing the minute hand, and running low on patience.

When I saw her that night about an hour after our usual dinner time, I said that her mother had called. I could see from her face that she was adding this to the day's mental bill.

"What was she so upset about?" I asked.

"The 7-11 thing. I should never have mentioned it."

"Oh. I thought . . . whatever."

Fortunately, we are going on vacation soon. We'll spend two weeks in a place where no one worries about their children. It's a paradise for adults,

who I see all day long reading on their porches and drinking white wine.

Thousand Island Park is its name, and it is located on an island in the St. Lawrence River just south of Canada. A Methodist summer resort founded in the nineteenth century, it continues to provide spiritual nourishment while relieving parents of their nerve-wracking sleeve-danglers.

Children wander free all day long. There is an adult-run kickball game or soccer match for them in the morning, if they're interested, and in the afternoon a whole lot of sweet nothing. Car use is de minimis. Bicycles and golf carts rule the sleepy dirt roads.

"Where are the kids?" Cynthia or I will ask, in a light voice, as if the answer doesn't much matter. But frequently the other will say, "They're at the Guzzle."

The Guzzle is an ice cream and penny-candy shop (with actual candy you can buy for a penny) in the center of town, with pimply kids manning the counter and some out-of-date video games in back. Everyone loves this place.

Now, I hate to tell you this, but last year it burned down.

We were falling asleep when a neighbor knocked at our door to let us know a fire had engulfed the Guzzle and several connected buildings, only a block away. We gathered our wallets, car keys, and some clothes, but in the end didn't have to flee. Firefighters, drawing water from the river when the town's antique hydrants proved unusable, bravely struggled to contain the fire and, in a few hours, put it out.

The next day people gathered by the wreckage. Photos were taken. A few Sunday painters set up their easels and began depicting the charred remains. No one had been injured, but everyone mourned the Guzzle, that adorable symbol of a barefoot childhood, now so rare, and its great corollary, unanxious parents.

It was no time at all before we heard that the town was vowing to rebuild.

DAVID SKINNER

# Demand the Documents

To paraphrase Lincoln, if we could first know where Iran is and whither Iran is tending, we could then better judge what to do, and how to do it. To evaluate the Iran deal, we need, to the degree possible, to understand the Iranian regime, its nature and its history, its past and present behavior.

The bad news is that the Obama administration doesn't want us to have all the information available to judge that regime and its behavior. The good news is that Congress can insist the information be provided.

Here's an important instance. We have been told by six current or former intelligence officials that the collection of documents captured in the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound includes explosive information on Iran's relationship with al Qaeda over the past two decades, including details of Iran's support for al Qaeda's attacks on Americans. Some of these officials believe this information alone could derail the deal. We haven't seen it. But the American people should see it all before Congress votes on the deal in September.

"There are letters about Iran's role, influence, and acknowledgment of enabling al Qaeda operatives to pass through Iran as long as al Qaeda did their dirty work against the Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan," Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, tells *THE WEEKLY STANDARD*. "What Congress should demand is to see all the UBL [Osama bin Laden] documents related to Iran and all the documents related to intentions of AQ into the future—they are very telling."

Derek Harvey, a former senior DIA official who has been described by several U.S. generals as the top intelligence analyst in government, helped run the exploitation team. He says,

The UBL treasure trove of information almost certainly contains extremely valuable, insightful information, and potentially explosive, that would illuminate the duplicitous Iran relationship with Osama Bin Laden and al Qaeda writ large.

Michael Pregent, a member of the DIA team that examined the documents, confirmed some of the revelations about Iran. As he put it,

The documents indicate that Iran facilitated the safe passage of al Qaeda operatives, provided safe houses during travel, and had an agreement in place—a you-don't-mess-with-us-and-we-won't-mess-with-you clause. The guaranteed safe passage through Iran into Afghanistan and Pakistan could only have been carried out by Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps operatives.



*Whither are they tending?*

The bin Laden documents have long been the subject of a behind-the-scenes battle between the White House and elements of the intelligence community. After an initial scrub of the documents in the months after the May 2011 raid in Abbottabad, the Obama administration let them sit untouched for as long as a year. When officials at the DIA and Central Command requested access to the collection to extract intelligence and provide it

to war fighters, they were initially denied. And soon after the team from DIA and CENTCOM was given limited access to the documents, they were ordered to stop their exploitation. What they did see was illuminating.

Among the most significant were documents that shed new light on the complicated relationship between Iran and al Qaeda. Even the Obama administration has acknowledged the relationship. In 2011, the administration designated six al Qaeda operatives who were responsible for what officials described as al Qaeda's lifeline. The network was based in Iran. "This network serves as the core pipeline through which al Qaeda moves money, facilitators, and operatives," according to the Treasury Department's designation. In an interview with *THE WEEKLY STANDARD* at the time, a senior Obama administration official involved in the designation said, "Without this network, al Qaeda's ability to recruit and collect funds would be severely damaged."

David Cohen, then undersecretary of the Treasury for terrorism and financial intelligence and currently the deputy director of the CIA, told *THE WEEKLY STANDARD* the intelligence on Iran's support for al Qaeda was incontrovertible.

“There is an agreement between the Iranian government and al Qaeda to allow this network to operate,” Cohen said. “There’s no dispute in the intelligence community on this.” Those conclusions were based, at least in part, on the bin Laden documents.

Contacted about the status of al Qaeda’s Iran network earlier this spring, two intelligence officials confirmed that it was still functioning and still critical to al Qaeda operations. That’s not all.

We are told that one document fills in the picture of possible Iranian foreknowledge and complicity in the 9/11 attacks first raised in the 9/11 Commission report, published in 2004. According to the report, al Qaeda detainees in U.S. custody

described the willingness of Iranian officials to facilitate the travel of al Qaeda members through Iran, on their way to and from Afghanistan. For example, Iranian border inspectors would be told not to place telltale stamps in the passports of these travelers. Such arrangements were particularly beneficial to Saudi members of al Qaeda. Our knowledge of the international travels of the al Qaeda operatives selected for the 9/11 operation remains fragmentary. But we now have evidence suggesting that 8 to 10 of the 14 Saudi “muscle” operatives traveled into or out of Iran between October 2000 and February 2001.

The 9/11 Commission detailed much of that travel and reported:

There is strong evidence that Iran facilitated the transit of al Qaeda members into and out of Afghanistan before 9/11, and that some of these were future 9/11 hijackers. There also is circumstantial evidence that senior Hezbollah operatives were closely tracking the travel of some of these future muscle hijackers into Iran in November 2000.

The commission concluded: “We believe this topic requires further investigation by the U.S. government.”

The Obama administration does not want the bin Laden documents released. To date, the administration has made public fewer than 150 documents out of more than a million, despite a statutory requirement to expedite the release of the collection. Remarkably, members of Congress, including those on the intelligence committees, do not have access to the documents. Republicans in Congress share the blame for this. With the admirable exception of Representative Devin Nunes, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, Republicans have shown little interest in the documents and what they tell us about al Qaeda and, in this case, Iran. That’s inexcusable, but it’s not too late.

The administration claims that the documents have been translated and exploited. We’re skeptical—and so are our sources. But if the administration is right, it should be able to find and release immediately all documents related to Iran.

Highly credible senior intelligence officials who have

seen the bin Laden documents say that the collection includes important information about al Qaeda and Iran. The White House has consistently blocked the release of that information. It will take concerted action by the leadership of Congress—in particular, Speaker of the House John Boehner, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, and Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee Richard Burr along with Chairman Nunes—to wring this information out of the administration.

Not to demand these documents—not to insist on having access to them despite all the administration’s protestations and obfuscations, not to allow the American people to understand the whole truth about the Iranian regime with which the administration has negotiated this agreement—would be an abdication of responsibility on the part of Congress that history would judge harshly.

—Stephen F. Hayes & William Kristol

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## A Pro-Life Opportunity

In the wake of the undercover videos showing Planned Parenthood’s involvement in the trafficking of aborted baby tissue and body parts, the U.S. Senate has scheduled a vote to defund Planned Parenthood. It’s a fine first step by Congress in response to the horror revealed by the Center for Medical Progress’s investigation.

For too long, Planned Parenthood, the billion-dollar “nonprofit” that performs more than 300,000 abortions each year, has been subsidized by American taxpayers. The organization’s defenders argue that the funds Congress seeks to take from Planned Parenthood—and give to community health centers (the bill specifies that federal spending “in support of women’s health” would not decrease)—do not directly pay for abortions. And that’s technically true. But there’s nothing to prevent a Planned Parenthood abortionist from spending half the day dismembering human beings and the other half being paid with federal tax dollars to fill prescriptions for birth control.

As a matter of principle, Congress should stop lining the pockets of abortionists with public money. But we shouldn’t lose sight of the fact that defunding Planned Parenthood will do little to curb the regime of abortion-on-demand in America. Abortion is a lucrative business. Cutting off federal funds for other services would deprive Planned Parenthood of a source of support, but it might not save any lives. There remain at least three more important pro-life priorities.



First, the Senate needs to vote on the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, which would ban almost all abortions after the fifth month of pregnancy (20 weeks after conception). An abortionist who operates four blocks from the White House advertises on his website that he will abort human beings for any reason up to 24 weeks after conception. Nearby, doctors and nurses in neonatal intensive care units work tirelessly to save premature infants who are born at that age and younger. This contradiction ought to be unacceptable.

Recent studies have found that nearly one in four premature infants born at 20 weeks after conception survive long-term. Nearly 90 percent of premature infants born 24 weeks after conception survive long-term.

A ban on abortion after the fifth month of pregnancy could save more than 18,000 lives each year. Such a ban would be the first national law to protect the life of any human being not yet born. (The partial-birth-abortion ban prohibits one method of abortion, but does not ban any late-term abortions outright.) Many Americans who describe themselves as pro-choice recoil at the thought of late-term abortion. Several polls have shown that American voters support a ban by 2-to-1. This measure, too, is just a start. But if we can't save the lives of infants old enough to feel pain and survive outside the womb, we won't save any lives.

Second, Congress should move to cut off subsidies for abortion under Obamacare. The Hyde amendment blocks direct federal funding of abortion under Medicaid, but it does not apply to taxpayer-subsidized Obamacare plans sold in states that haven't passed their own laws prohibiting elective abortion coverage under Obamacare. Taxpayer funding of abortion is consistently unpopular, and the issue nearly brought down Obamacare in an overwhelmingly Democratic Congress in 2010. The No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act, which would make the Hyde amendment permanent law and apply it to Obamacare, would cut off federal subsidies for elective abortions. Repealing Obamacare and replacing it with a conservative alternative would accomplish the same goal.

Third, and most important of all, is the fate of the Supreme Court, which hangs in the balance in the 2016 election. By the end of the next president's first term, four sitting justices will be over the age of 80. Originalist Antonin Scalia and "swing-vote" Anthony Kennedy will both be 84. Liberal activists Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer will be, respectively, 87 and 82.

If Hillary Clinton replaces Kennedy or Scalia with another lockstep liberal, the Court may very well invalidate the Hyde amendment and mandate unlimited and direct taxpayer funding of abortion under Medicaid. A solidly liberal majority could also invalidate the ban on partial-birth abortion and any other modest restrictions on abortion. (And there's no telling what a solidly liberal majority would do in other areas, such as free speech, religious liberty, gun rights, economic policy, criminal justice, and national security.)

If a Republican president has the opportunity to replace one or two liberal activists on the Supreme Court, however, that could lead to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and allow the American people through their representatives to enact greater protections for human life.

Conservative and pro-life voters have been betrayed before by Republican Supreme Court nominees. Between 1980 and 1992, pro-life presidents Reagan and Bush won three elections and made a total of five Supreme Court appointments. Had all of their appointees faithfully interpreted the Constitution, *Roe v. Wade* would have been overturned 7-2 in the 1992 case *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. Instead, *Roe* was upheld 5-4 in a fit of judicial capriciousness. Reagan appointee Anthony Kennedy initially voted in conference to overturn *Roe*, but changed his mind to uphold the constitutional right invented by the Supreme Court in 1973.

Conservatives should insist that the next Republican president refrain from appointing another stealth nominee to the Supreme Court. They should be emboldened by Harry Reid's attack on the judicial filibuster to appoint constitutionalists to the bench. But first they have to win the 2016 election.

—John McCormack

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## Fuel on the Fire

John Kerry is bullish on the Middle East. He believes that the Iran deal will make it possible for the White House and Tehran to tamp down wars in places like Syria and Yemen. And—who knows?—maybe even solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Since the deal was struck, says Kerry, Javad Zarif, the foreign minister, and President Hassan Rouhani "have made it clear that, with the agreement, they are prepared to discuss the regional issues." And that's a really good thing, because a "Middle East that is on fire is going to be more manageable with this [nuclear] deal, and opens more potential for us to be able to try to deal with those fires."

Some of Kerry's colleagues are much less sanguine. They think the Islamic Republic is less a fireman than a pyromaniac. "If Iran were to commit aggression," said defense secretary Ashton Carter last week, "our robust force posture ensures we can rapidly surge an overwhelming array of forces into the region, leveraging our most advanced capability, married with sophisticated munitions that put no target out of reach."

Kerry, confusingly, agrees with that, too. As he said in

his testimony on Capitol Hill last week. “We will push back against Iran’s other activities.”

Why can’t Obama’s cabinet get its story straight? Is Iran a potential helpful partner or a strategic threat?

Kerry and Carter can’t get the story straight because the narrative is being woven above their pay grade. The only one who has the answer is Obama—and of course Ali Khamenei. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is an agreement between two supreme leaders. They sent their diplomats off to Europe to talk about the nuclear file, but the actual agreement is about far more than nukes.

With the Iran deal, the Obama administration aims to bring Iran closer into the American orbit and pushes traditional Middle East allies, especially Israel, further away. Both Kerry the eager peacemaker and Carter the diligent warrior have it wrong. The clerical regime is going to do exactly what it wants—or the Iranians will walk away from the deal. It didn’t have to be written into the deal that if the Western powers try to reinstate sanctions, Tehran can opt out of the deal. But it is written into the deal. Sanctions aren’t going to snap back, and the White House is never going to push back.

This means Iran will have enormous leverage in the region. Take Syria, for instance. Obama has talked for four years about arming Syrian rebels to topple the Assad regime, but he never did anything to bring down the Syrian butcher, Tehran’s man, because he didn’t want to damage Iran’s interests in Syria and risk the chance that Khamenei would stop opening his letters. Rather than enforce his own red lines, Obama laid off Assad to signal the Iranians that he wanted an accommodation with them: If he wouldn’t use military force against a Syrian mass-murderer who openly defied him, he surely wasn’t going to start a war with Iran.

So how do Kerry and the administration’s various media surrogates deal with the Syrian civil war post-deal? Well, they say, the Russians are starting to think Assad might be a bad bet, and even the Iranians are hinting at some flexibility. Maybe there’s a Syria settlement to be had.

Nonsense. What used to be the Assad regime is now under Iranian management, and what Iran wants from the Syrian war is to consolidate control over key regions, including along the Golan border with Israel. That puts Israel in conflict not only with Iran but also with a White House that has a deep commitment to its deal with Tehran. Obama didn’t go after Assad previously to keep Iran at the table. Why would he confront Iran now and risk seeing the deal fall apart?

Ashton Carter says the American military is prepared to confront Iran. And risk the deal that his boss has staked his legacy on? That, too, is nonsense. When Obama deployed force in Syria, it was to attack front-line jihadist units, like ISIS and the Nusra Front, which opened up space and time for Assad and his Iranian allies to chase other rebel forces. When the White House calls in anti-ISIS airstrikes in Iraq, no one is happier than

Qassem Suleimani, commander of Iran’s Quds Force and guarantor of Iran’s interests in Iraq.

If the White House ever were to confront Iran on regional issues, the clerical regime would simply threaten to walk away from the deal or cheat on it. If the administration called out Iran for not living up to the terms of the deal, the Iranians would walk away or threaten to burn some part of the region—maybe the Saudi border, maybe the Golan. That’s how power politics is played by serious people. It’s a far cry from gnawing on Twizzlers in a Vienna hotel room after midnight while brokering a nuclear deal with Iran that is absolutely worthless because it has no real inspection and verification regime.

Obama wouldn’t dream of confronting Iran because he has understood from the beginning that the nuclear program is not the only issue. The deep purpose of the JCPOA is to lock the United States into a regional accommodation with Tehran. The United States has to follow Iran’s lead on regional issues, or the mullahs will walk. That’s a feature, not a bug. Because as Obama has always seen it, America is overinvested in the Middle East, and it’s time to get out once and for all. Iran will supply the boots on the ground to take care of what fighting needs to be done.

The plain fact, though, is this: Given the expansive and imperial nature of the Iranian regime, aligning our interests with Tehran’s will bring more violence and instability to the region, not less. The White House says that the only alternative to its JCPOA is war. No, it’s the Iran deal that invites a widening and increasingly vicious war, with America on the same side as the bloodthirsty, obscurantist regime in Tehran. Killing the Iran deal is the way to avoid war.

—Lee Smith

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## Blaming Israel First

In May, President Barack Obama donned a yarmulke and spoke in a Washington, D.C., synagogue. He reminded his audience that Jeffrey Goldberg, a member of the congregation, once called him the “first Jewish president.” He claimed to be flattered by the characterization. And perhaps he was—most Jews, after all, voted for him for president, and many Jews of Obama’s acquaintance have sometimes seemed to care more about the well-being of Planned Parenthood than about the survival of the state of Israel.

But recently Obama seems to have soured on the chosen people. At a press conference on July 16, Obama urged members of Congress to make their decision on the Iran deal based “not on politics. Not on posturing. Not on the fact that



this is a deal that I bring to Congress, as opposed to a Republican president. Not based on lobbying.”

To which group of Americans exercising their First Amendment rights was the president referring in his strictures against lobbying? Presumably he didn’t mean J Street and other of his allies lobbying on behalf of the deal. Presumably he meant opponents of the deal. And indeed, a few days later on the *Daily Show*, Obama expressed his confidence that Congress would support the deal despite “the money” and “the lobbyists” working against it. In case you’re new to the murkier waters of American political science: “Money” + “lobbyists” = AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Obama’s secretary of state, John Kerry, has been less subtle. On July 18, Kerry claimed on NPR that if Congress rejects a deal, the United States will face a choice of either going to war or accepting a nuclear Iran: “And then you are right into conflict, with presidential candidates screaming at Obama: ‘What are you going to do now? You’ve got to bomb them! You’ve got to use military force!’ And, you’re going to—and Israel’s saying the same thing—and you’ll see another \$20 million spent to convince people that’s what they have to do.”

According to Kerry, then, the pro-Israel lobby is spending a lot of money to defeat the deal, after which Israel and its lobbyists will push the United States to war. He made the point even more directly on July 23 at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing: “People are going to be saying, well, what are we going to do about it? They’re enriching. You’ll hear the prime minister of Israel calling me up: ‘Time to bomb.’”

The prime minister of Israel is going to call up the U.S. secretary of state and say, “Time to bomb”? Really? Has an American secretary of state ever so childishly insulted the prime minister of an ally?

The next day, on July 24, at the Council on Foreign Relations, Kerry returned to his favorite new theme. He asserted that if Congress rejected the deal, “our friends in Israel could actually wind up being more isolated. And more blamed.” In other words, the Obama administration and its allies will see to it that Israel is more isolated. And more blamed. Not because of anything Israel has done. But because the elected representatives of the American people will have rejected John Kerry’s deal.

We are old enough to remember when it was Republicans who sought to blame Israel first. President George H. W. Bush’s secretary of state James Baker was reported to have said privately, when exasperated with Israel, “F— the Jews. They don’t vote for us anyway.” Around that time, right-wing isolationist pundit Pat Buchanan remarked, “Capitol Hill is Israeli-occupied territory.” And the year before, after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, Buchanan famously said, “There are only two groups that are beating the drums for war in the Middle East—the Israeli defense ministry and its amen corner

in the United States.” That amen corner included Bush and Baker, one supposes, who ignored Buchanan and expelled Saddam from Kuwait.

Baker could dismiss the Jews because American Jews reliably voted Democratic. Obama and Kerry can denigrate the prime minister of Israel and Obama can denigrate pro-Israel activists because Americans Jews reliably vote Democratic—in other words, “F— the Jews. They vote for us anyway.”

But the all-too-frequent political stupidity of American Jews doesn’t justify a White House held by either party delegitimizing Israel’s security interests and those Americans who are concerned about them.

Eric Hoffer, the “longshoreman philosopher,” said it well 47 years ago:

The Jews are a peculiar people: Things permitted to other nations are forbidden to the Jews. Other nations drive out thousands, even millions of people and there is no refugee problem. Russia did it; Poland and Czechoslovakia did it; Turkey drove out a million Greeks, and Algeria a million Frenchmen; Indonesia threw out heaven knows how many Chinese—and no one says a word about refugees.

But in the case of Israel, the displaced Arabs have become eternal refugees. Everyone insists Israel must take back every single Arab. Arnold Toynbee calls the displacement of the Arabs an atrocity greater than any committed by the Nazis.

Other nations when victorious on the battlefield dictate peace terms. But when Israel is victorious it must sue for peace. Everyone expects the Jews to be the only real Christians in this world.

Other nations when they are defeated survive and recover. But should Israel be defeated it would be destroyed. Had Nasser triumphed last June [1967], he would have wiped Israel off the map, and no one would have lifted a finger to save the Jews. . . .

Yet at this moment, Israel is our only reliable and unconditional ally. We can rely more on Israel than Israel can rely on us. And one has only to imagine what would have happened last summer had the Arabs and their Russian backers won the war to realize how vital the survival of Israel is to America and the West in general.

I have a premonition that will not leave me; as it goes with Israel, so will it go with all of us. Should Israel perish, the holocaust will be upon us.

Eric Hoffer lacked the pedigree of a John Kerry, the cleverness of a James Baker, the facility of a Pat Buchanan, the glibness of a Barack Obama. He was merely an American patriot, a defender of the West, an interpreter of everyday experience, and an apostle of common sense. If he were alive today, he would not be intimidated when career politicians tried to dismiss him as an apologist for the Israel lobby. He would have worn their scorn as a badge of honor. As should all of us, Jews and non-Jews, who choose to stand with Israel and to “lobby” for the national security interests of the United States.

—William Kristol & Michael Makovsky

# Down But Not Out

Christie's formula: patience, confidence, more patience. **BY STEPHEN F. HAYES**



*Christie serves up a selfie in Manchester, New Hampshire, July 29, 2015.*

Shirley Paulson showed up to 50-cent wing night at Lab 'n Lager in downtown Keene not for a cheap dozen of the highly addictive garlic jalapeno wings but because she wanted a crack at New Jersey governor Chris Christie.

The 83-year-old Boston transplant raised four kids, outlasted three husbands, and spent 30 years making pitches to “businessmen a lot smarter than me,” as she sold radio ads in this gritty old manufacturing town. So, no, she wasn’t intimidated at the prospect of a confrontation with the sometimes-caustic presidential candidate.

During the two-hour town hall here on July 27, Christie fielded questions on topics ranging from the obvious (Obamacare, veterans’ affairs, illegal immigration, Iran) to the odd (whether he had, in fact, dozed off at a

Bruce Springsteen concert last spring). Christie reported that he opposes Obamacare, favors better care for veterans, wants tighter border security, and thinks the Iran deal is the worst thing Barack Obama has done as president. And since you’re curious, no, he had not fallen asleep; he was simply caught having a “spiritual” moment at his “124th” Springsteen show.

Paulson was here for another reason. She wanted to ask her second-favorite candidate about her favorite. “I have a question for you,” she began, noting in her preamble that America is a “capitalistic society” struggling to match its historical success. “Why do you and all the other presidential candidates think you can do better than a gentleman named Donald Trump, who has been extremely successful and understands what capitalism is about and has done extremely well? And,” she said, picking up steam, “don’t tell me it’s because you have political experience. . . . I don’t really want to hear that.”

“Well, I love the fact that you asked the question and tell me what I can answer,” Christie replied to audience laughter.

“I’m like that,” Paulson responded, resolutely. “That’s the way I am.”

“Now I understand exactly why you like Donald.”

Christie, who said he’s been a friend of Trump for 13 years, offered a long explanation of why Trump’s business skills are not “transferable” to government. It’s not possible to shout “You’re fired!” at a congressional leader who tells you he doesn’t have the votes, Christie explained. “You can do that on a reality TV show but you cannot fire the speaker of the House or the Senate majority leader because you don’t get what you want.”

Paulson wasn’t satisfied. “In other words, you’re saying that you have to be a politician?”

“No, what I’m saying is you have to have some experience in knowing how to deal with people in that way. And he has not shown that over the course of his career.”

“I’m not so sure about that.”

“Then we have a fundamental disagreement about—”

“That’s right.”

“That’s okay,” Christie said with a smile. “Then vote for Donald Trump. It’s fine. It’s a free country. You can vote for whoever you want who’s on the ballot here on February 9.”

Christie then mocked a popular Trump talking point. “When he says that he’s going to build a wall across the entire 2,000-mile border between the United States and Mexico, and he’s going to make Mexico pay for it—that’s a great line, right? Everybody loves that! Great! We’re going to get the wall and we don’t have to pay for it!”

“He got a lot of attention for it,” Paulson interjected.

“If the goal here is to find the person to be president of the United States who can get the most attention—he’s gonna win hands-down. If it is the person who can most effectively govern our nation and deal with the world, I’d suggest to you that I’m in this race because I’d be better than him. You have a different opinion? Then vote

*Stephen F. Hayes is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

AP/JIM COLE



for him. That's fine by me. I don't need to get every vote. I just gotta get more than anybody else."

It wasn't the kind of testy Christie exchange that would become an instant YouTube classic, but Paulson appreciated his candor. "That was a damn good answer," she said to a friend as she sat down.

Christie spoke to her after the town hall. "You're voting for me in February," he said, as he threw his arm around her shoulder. "You know it and I know it. You're not voting for him, you're voting for me."

If he's right, she doesn't know it yet. "Before Trump came on the scene, Christie was my favorite," she told me later. But for now she's not budging. "No, nothing changed my mind."

And this is Christie's problem. He used to be the favorite of a lot of people. Now, not so much.

In a Monmouth poll of New Hampshire Republicans released hours after Christie's event in Keene, Trump leads with 24 percent of those surveyed, while Christie, at 4 percent, is in 8th place. If Trump were not in the race, however, Christie would benefit more than any other candidate, with 15 percent of Trump's voters choosing the New Jersey governor as their second pick—enough to put Christie in a strong third place in a Trump-less field.

Christie isn't panicking. In an interview at Lindy's Diner, Christie told me about a conversation with a confidant he wouldn't name. "He said to me: 'Listen, the hardest thing in the world for you in all of this is going to be to be patient. Just be patient. It's going to come to you. Just remain patient and do what you do. You're going to be fine. That's the conversation I have with myself every day.'"

Although it was just past 10 A.M., Christie, who is notably thinner since weight-loss surgery in 2013, was sipping on a milkshake. He was pensive, but there was no sign that he's lost any confidence in himself or his prospects.

In January 2014, shortly after he was reelected overwhelmingly to his second term as New Jersey governor, the *Washington Post* placed Christie at the top of its ranking of the 2016 GOP field.

Christie is "best positioned to build the coalition of major donors, party activists and GOP elites necessary to win the nomination."

Today, Christie is in danger of becoming an also-ran. In national polls released in the last two weeks by ABC News, CNN, and Quinnipiac, Christie is, respectively, in 10th place, 8th place and 10th place. The Fox News debate on August 6 will include only those candidates in the top 10 in national polling. Christie is more likely than not to make the cut, but the fact that it's even possible he'd be excluded indicates just how far he's fallen.

What happened? "Bridgegate happened," Christie says. In September 2013, three top Christie aides conspired to create a mammoth traffic jam in Fort Lee, New Jersey, by restricting rush hour access to the George Washington Bridge. Prosecutors alleged that the lane closures were political payback for the town's mayor, who refused to endorse Christie's reelection bid. Christie has long maintained he had no knowledge of the plan, and none of the various investigations has accused him directly of wrongdoing. But the political toll has been significant.

"There was an onslaught of media coverage that was hyperbolic and untrue. There's really no other explanation for it," he says.

"The other piece of it is that Jeb got in the race and he's another person who is viewed, rightly or wrongly, as kind of an establishment candidate. And so . . . now you're competing with another person for that slice of the pie."

Bush's entry squeezed Christie's fundraising, too. Christie has a strong national network of donors from his tenure as head of the Republican Governors Association. He hasn't yet filed an FEC report for his campaign, since he announced the day the second quarter came to a close, but contributions to outside groups supporting Jeb Bush are beating those to a pro-Christie super-PAC by a factor of 10-to-1.

On this, too, Christie's approach combines patience and confidence. In his pitch to donors, Christie reminds

them of flash-in-the-pan candidates in previous cycles and notes that the eventual winners were sometimes asterisks in the early polling. "Bet on talent," he tells them.

This confidence is what Christie calls the "operating premise" of his campaign. "We have better ideas. We communicate them better. And we're going to try to force everybody else to come out with their ideas and communicate them. And then, when we're standing up on that stage, and everyone is standing next to each other, people are going to go: 'He's the most credible choice.'"

The key to this strategy, he says, is placing the most challenging set of issues at the center of his campaign. And that means entitlements, which he talked about at length at Lab 'n Lager, standing in front of a red-white-and-blue sign touting his campaign's slogan: "Telling It Like It Is."

While Christie has offered detailed plans for reforming Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, rival campaigns argue that he's an imperfect messenger. True, Christie has called for bold entitlement reform for years and in a 2011 speech chastised congressional Republicans for cowardice. Failure to reform Medicare and Medicaid, he said, would lead the country to "ruin."

But Obamacare presented a dilemma. The federal government offered to cover most of the additional costs incurred by states that expanded Medicaid—at least initially. But the federal support diminishes over time, meaning state taxpayers will have to fund the difference. When the Supreme Court ruled in 2012 that states could not be compelled to participate in expanding Medicaid, Christie was blunt, calling the scheme "extortion." He said: "It was in a whole bunch of nice words in a bill, but it was extortion. So I'm really glad that a majority of the Supreme Court still supports the proposition . . . that extortion is still illegal in the country, even when it's done by the president of the United States."

Despite this strong language, Christie opted to expand Medicaid in New

Jersey. He said at the time that he saw few other options. Refusing to expand it, he argued, would mean choosing to pass on money available to other states. And as a governor facing a challenging fiscal situation, he couldn't say no.

New Jersey, he says, already subsidized health care for its citizens living up to 200 percent of the poverty line—well above the 133 percent covered by the federal government. “Expansion was a misnomer,” he says. “My point is—if you’re governor of New Jersey and you’re being offered a deal where you’re going to get net additional revenue to you of \$200-\$220 million annually, for doing something that essentially you’re already doing,” you have to do it.

Phil Kerpen, a conservative activist who runs American Commitment and has worked in New Jersey, doesn’t buy it. “Like [Ohio governor John] Kasich and unlike the rest of the field, Christie took federal tax dollars to add able-bodied working-age adults to the Medicaid rolls, despite the evidence expansion makes people less likely to work and does not improve health outcomes. In my judgment, a politician who is unwilling or unable to communicate why able-bodied working-age adults should not be on welfare programs is not well equipped to be a Republican standard-bearer.”

Christie says that he will, eventually, call out fellow Republicans by name if they fail to offer serious solutions to the entitlement crisis. But he’s not going to do it in the first couple of debates. “You don’t want to do it now. Then they get 30 seconds to respond! In a timed debate with 10 people on there, you’re not going to hear me mention names.”

If he won’t do it in the debates, Christie isn’t afraid to criticize his opponents off the stage. Last week, Jeb Bush ran into trouble when he said that it was time to “phase out” Medicare “and move to a new system” that is sustainable. Democrats naturally seized on his call to “phase out” the program and Bush later clarified his position. Christie isn’t sympathetic.

“Jeb’s saying, ‘I think we should, you know, raise the retirement age maybe.’ And now he’s complaining

that people are mischaracterizing his position on entitlement reform? I said the other day that if you’re going to be vague about it, you allow people to mischaracterize it. I got a 12-point plan. They can’t mischaracterize it.”

Christie believes that he can explain his decision to expand Medicaid and hopes that straight talk on entitlement reform will allow him to replicate the kind of resurgence that won John McCain the Republican nomination in 2008, a year after the pundit class had declared him toast. And, like McCain, he is all-in for New Hampshire.

“The way you win up here is to come up here the most, spend the most time, you meet people face to face,” Christie explained. “And then when they decide in the last 10 days, which is when most people in New Hampshire decide, they’re going to remember that time they saw you here at this place in July.”

And what then?

“I come in first or second in New Hampshire. Your biggest problem then is going to be to make sure your server doesn’t crash from all the donations you’re going to be getting. So you’ve won one of the first two real important races where people vote. So you’re going to get a lot of money. We’ve seen South Carolina can often be dictated to in terms of momentum based on what’s happened in Iowa and New Hampshire. So I think if you come in first or second in New Hampshire, and especially me, where it’ll be called ‘The Great Comeback’”—and here Christie slips into newscaster voice—“*Where’d he come from? It’s amazing!* And all this stuff. So you’ll get a lot of momentum going into South Carolina and then you gotta build a national campaign.”

Can you do it that quickly?

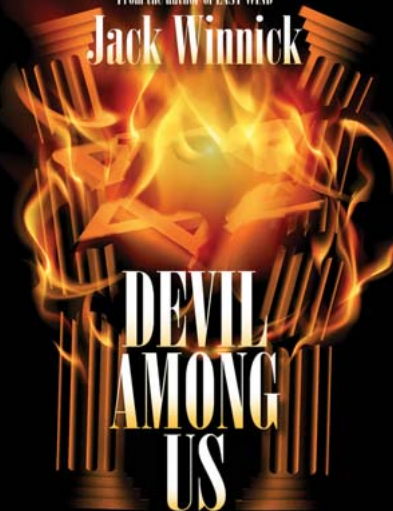
“Sure you can. . . . It’s not like I don’t have friends in every state. I’ve got sitting governors in states—some of them are already supporting me and others of them will support me in the next few months. And so, yeah—you just adopt their organizations.”

It’s not an easy path, to be sure, but Christie is confident that it’s a path. “This game has always gone to the patient person. Always.” ♦

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# Solution in Search of a Problem

Will the new debate format really affect the 2016 result? BY MICHAEL WARREN

No one quite knows what the first Republican debate will look like, who exactly will be onstage, or what it means that Donald Trump will be there, too. This, it seems, is the Republican National Committee's solution to the debacle of the 2012 debates. The problems are memorable: too many primary debates, too many damaging questions from television anchors with liberal biases.

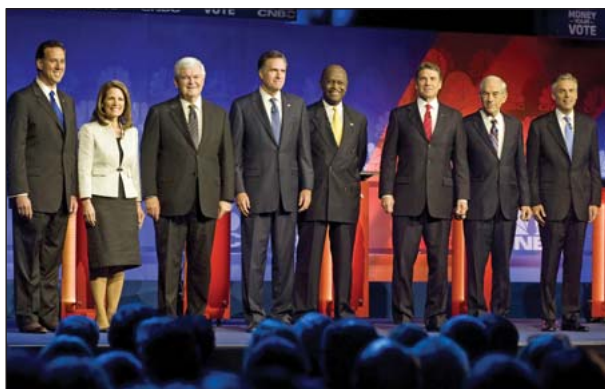
"Most observers concluded after the 2012 election that the packed debate schedule was a disservice to the candidates—and, more important, to the voters," the RNC's Sean Spicer wrote in a recent *Wall Street Journal* op-ed ahead of the first debate August 6.

A third group of people expressed their frustration: Republican donors. And so not long after Mitt Romney's defeat, the RNC began formulating a strategy to fix the process. This features prominently in its autopsy of the 2012 race. The report's recommendations—fewer debates, starting later in the year prior to the presidential election, and penalties for candidates participating in nonsanctioned debates—became the basis for the RNC's new rules. The autopsy concluded that making these fixes would put the 2016 nominee in a much better position to win.

But two years later, the RNC's effort to exert control has failed. The first debate, at least, is likely to

be a spectacle defined by the mainstream press. Despite a highly qualified, diverse, and impressive field of Republican candidates, the lack of debates this summer hasn't allowed many of them to shine. Instead, the loudest voices—really, one loud voice in particular—overshadow the rest.

Donald Trump has dominated the conversation. According to media



2012: the bad old days

analyst Andrew Tyndall, half of the 2016 coverage on the three major TV network news broadcasts during June and July was about Trump; CNN, at times, feels like an in-kind contribution to the Trump campaign. Without a debate this summer—there had already been two GOP primary debates by August 2011—other candidates have been denied the equal footing of a debate stage to push back against Trump's one-man self-promotion machine.

This hasn't stopped the RNC from preemptively declaring victory. In the *Journal*, Spicer explained the committee had three goals in mind when it sought to reform its presidential primary debate process: introduce

"predictability" to the schedule, involve conservative outlets to counter the liberal bias of the mainstream media, and spread the events to locations outside the early primary states. According to Spicer, all three goals have been met.

But the process has been predictable only in the narrowest sense. For months, campaigns have known there would be one debate a month from August to December, then six more debates in the first three months of 2016. Alas, the calendar's been about the only predictable aspect of the contests. No one guessed there would be this many viable Republican candidates. To accommodate the large field—17 have filed so far—Fox News will air an hour-long 5 P.M. "pre-debate forum" with those candidates who

don't qualify to participate in its primetime debate at 9 P.M. on August 6, while CNN's September 16 debate will be divided into two back-to-back events, with second-tier candidates battling first.

It's not been easy to anticipate who will even be allowed in which debates. Fox's "top 10" cutoff will be determined by the candidates' average standing in the five most recent, reputable national polls released

by 5 P.M. on August 4. Several candidates find themselves floating at the cutoff threshold in the days leading up to the first debate, one poll away from inclusion or exclusion. How's that for predictability?

On the second goal, the RNC's been more successful. Three of the upcoming debates will be cosponsored by conservative media outlets and mainstream broadcasters: the CNN debate with Salem Radio, an NBC/Telemundo debate with *National Review*, and an ABC debate with online startup *Independent Journal Review*. By having more ideologically aligned journalists asking questions, the party's thinking goes, there's a smaller chance the candidates will be

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IMAGES: NEWSROOM

caught in unfair “gotcha” moments and a better chance for a substantive discussion of the issues.

Finally, the “goal” to hold more debates outside of the early primary states doesn’t make much sense. The candidates will debate in Ohio, California, Colorado, and Wisconsin before they do so in Nevada, Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina. But they’ll all be airing on national TV, with the candidates debating national issues. Spicer argues that having debates outside Iowa, New Hampshire, and the rest “brings more people into the process.” That’s nice, but what does it mean?

So what was the point of all these changes to the debates, anyway? Spicer tells me in an interview that a number of potential 2016 candidates—he won’t say who—approached the RNC more than two years ago to ask that the debate process be reformed. The reason, he says, is that the candidates thought the debates had become unwieldy, a time- and resource-draining exercise that kept them off the trail, where they could actually talk and interact with real voters. It’s hard to imagine a candidate for president wanting to spend more time talking to 16 voters at a stretch in Sioux City rather than 6 million people watching at home, but anything’s possible.

Spicer contended in his op-ed that without these changes, “the debates would be neither this inclusive nor this orderly.” Less orderly than having a reality star who regularly calls his fellow Republican candidates “losers” on the stage? Less inclusive than leaving out of the first debate the 2012 runner-up (Rick Santorum), the only female candidate (Carly Fiorina), and the only Asian-American candidate (Bobby Jindal)? Perish the thought.

The more critical question, for donors and loyal Republican voters alike, is whether any of the changes will help the eventual nominee win the general election. I asked Spicer if Romney would have been able to win in 2012 with these new rules. He paused.

“That’s a really good question,” Spicer said. “I don’t know.” ♦

# Why They Like Him

## The Republicans’ principal-agent problem.

BY JAY COST

Donald Trump is not going to be the next nominee of the Republican party. The flamboyant businessman has made billions in real estate, but politics is another matter. He manifestly lacks the temperament to be president, and his conversion to the Republican party is of recent vintage. As the field narrows, and voters look closely at the other candidates, Trump will fade.



*Nope—not gonna happen.*

Still, the Trump surge should remind Republican politicians of a truth they may prefer to forget: Their voters do not like them anymore. Tune out Trump’s bombast and what’s left is a simple, compelling message to the Republican base: The rest of your party has been bought and paid for, but I’m my own man, and I’ll actually represent *you*.

All else being equal, it is surprising this message should resonate. For a party that does not control the White House, the GOP is in incredibly strong shape. Tallying up the

state legislative, gubernatorial, and congressional seats, Republicans are as strong as they have been since the 1920s. History suggests that the GOP should win the White House, too: The Democrats are going for a historically rare third consecutive term; the incumbent president’s approval is weak; and their presumptive nominee has acute ethical problems.

Yet the Republican party’s approval rating is abysmal, hovering in the mid-30s. A party only hits such a low when its own supporters are disenchanted with it. The polling weakness squares with what one gleans listening to talk radio and reading right-wing websites. There is widespread distrust of the GOP among the most energetic and engaged conservatives.

And why should they trust this party? To win majorities in 2010 and 2014, congressional Republicans grossly overstated what they could accomplish so long as Barack Obama is president. Before the 2010 midterm, Mike Pence, at the time chairman of the House Republican Caucus, told Sean Hannity:

What I’ve said is there will be no compromise on ending this era of runaway spending, deficits, and debt. No compromise on repealing Obamacare lock, stock, and barrel. No compromise on defending the broad mainstream values of the American people in the way we spend the people’s money at home and abroad. On issues that go straight to principle and straight to the concern the American people have on spending and taxes and values, there’ll be no compromise.

But, of course, there has been “compromise” on Obamacare. There had to be! Ours is not a parliamentary system, but a separation-of-powers regime in which the president retains substantial authority to block legislative action.

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Suggesting otherwise to voters, as Pence (and other senior Republicans) did, courts disenchantment.

Ditto the Senate. When, during the 2012 campaign, it looked like Republicans would take the upper chamber, Mitch McConnell suggested that Obamacare could be repealed through the budget reconciliation process, which requires just 51 votes. “The chief justice said it’s a tax. Taxes are clearly what we call reconcilable. That’s the kind of measure that can be pursued with 51 votes in the Senate,” he said. “If I’m the leader of the majority next year, I commit to the American people that the repeal of Obamacare will be job one.” Yet last year McConnell argued that it would take a filibuster-proof Senate majority to undo Obamacare.

Since 2010, the actions of congressional Republicans have mostly fallen shy of campaign promises. From a short-term perspective, this may have been necessary. It is hard to mobilize your voters by saying, “Vote for me to stop the president from doing worse.” It is better to say, “Vote for me to roll back the president’s actions.” But over time this rhetorical overreach has facilitated a climate of distrust. Republican voters increasingly believe that their leaders, even if they had complete control of government, would not do half of what they promise on the campaign trail.

The Republican party took control of Congress in 1994, but perhaps it is better to say that the opposite is true. Congress by that point was wholly immersed in what political scientist Theodore Lowi called “interest-group liberalism”: the systematic expansion of government at the behest of the interest groups that dominate the political process. For good-government conservatives, this system is doubly offensive because it expands government in a partial and unfair way.

While the Republican insurgents of the 104th Congress did a lot of good, they failed to demolish this regime. In many respects, they strengthened it. As Matt Continetti argues in *The K Street Gang*, Republican leaders wanted to build an insuperable majority by courting Beltway lobbyists that

could lavish them with campaign cash. The 2006 midterm may have dashed that hope, but the congressional GOP is still deeply committed to interest-group liberalism. Look at the proliferation of earmarks, the cost of which increased 300 percent between 1995 and 2006; it was *congressional Democrats* that first put limits on them. Look at last year’s farm bill, which was a bloated payout to agribusinesses. Look at the new highway bill, which authorizes substantially more spending than the Highway Trust Fund can finance. Look at the Senate GOP’s support of the Export-Import Bank, despite the fact it is just corporate welfare.

Some of these issues are fairly deep in the policy weeds, so the average voter might not know the specifics. But there is no doubt that grassroots conservatives get the gist. Republicans have been promising since 1994 to reform government, soup to nuts. Twenty-one years later, Washington remains stubbornly unreformed. It does not take a Brookings white paper to figure out what has happened: Republicans in Congress did not follow through, even when they had complete control of government. And with a Democratic president, congressional Republicans still do far less than they could.

Then there is the hot-button issue of immigration, on which Trump has played up the wide divergence between the party’s base and leadership. The leadership, spurred by a panoply of interest groups, wants comprehensive reform that typically includes amnesty for illegal immigrants and an increase in legal immigration. Grassroots conservatives, meanwhile, are deeply concerned about the effect of massive immigration on wages, not to mention its downstream effects on the culture. Unlike the arcana of the farm bill, these are matters average Republicans grasp on an intuitive level, and they do not trust the leadership to serve their interests.

In economic terms, this is called a principal-agent problem. GOP voters (the principals) have empowered elected officials (the agents) to reduce and reform government, but the latter have not done so. Is it any wonder

that a guy like the Donald can thrive in this situation? He is the perfect vehicle to express the deep frustration conservatives feel. Bombastic, brash, and indiscreet, he comes across as a straight-shooter who tells it like it is. After a generation of being misled by their leaders, many conservatives find this a breath of fresh air.

Of course, Trump is not what he claims to be. He is hardly a paragon of conservative virtue, having supported Democratic politicians and liberal causes until quite recently. And it is all well and good to be frustrated; it is quite another to *do* something about it. Trump would never get anything done, even if he could win a general election (which he can’t). His in-your-face style might work great on a reality TV show, but the Framers designed our system to thwart such bullies.

This is why principal-agent problems can be so dangerous. They create leadership vacuums that any two-bit demagogue may fill, to the detriment of everybody involved. In the case of Trump, his rise to the top of the heap has been an unfortunate time suck. The party is currently too distracted by the Donald to think about the big issues or determine which candidates are of presidential mettle. Worse, Trump is prone to saying outrageous things that needlessly alienate independent voters from conservatism.

It is fair to blame Trump’s supporters for this, at least in part, for they really should know better. There are a host of serious candidates who actually could upend the status quo in Washington, but they are lost amid Trump’s clown show. Still, there is a bigger point we must not miss: Donald Trump is not the Republican party’s real problem; he is a *symptom* of the problem. There is a generation-long climate of distrust between conservative voters and Republican politicians. Trump is simply taking advantage of this weakness.

Ultimately, the primary blame for Trump rests with the party’s leadership. If average conservatives really believed that the party would ever follow through on its campaign rhetoric, Trump would be an asterisk in the polls. ♦



# How to Shrink the Economy

Follow Hillary's 'growth' prescription.

BY FRED BARNES

Hillary Clinton is a reflection. Whatever the left wing of the Democratic party embraces, she reflects. Not in toto, however. That would locate her too far to the left and jeopardize her quest for the presidency. She's a partial reflection.

Yet her sympathies are clear. And that's the point. Her goal is no enemies on the left. To achieve this, she's adopted two of the left's most dubious new ideas. One is forcing employers to increase their employees' wages. The other is operating as if tax rates don't matter.

Like Bernie Sanders, the Vermont socialist who is the Democratic party's embodiment of left-wing values, Clinton is no champion of free markets—and never was. Coercing businesses into hiking wages is the antithesis of the free market approach identified with presidents such as Ronald Reagan and John F. Kennedy.

They slashed individual income tax rates. The result: strong economic growth that boosted productivity and its by-product, wage increases. Clinton endorses growth, but unconvincingly. In a July speech she proposed to raise tax rates on capital gains, claiming it would lead to strong growth and help the middle class. Sorry, but tax increases are far more likely to impede growth than spur it.

Government coercion will help some—at the expense of others. On this Clinton is just short of all-in

with the Sanders left. In her speech, she endorsed a minimum wage of \$15 an hour, with a hedge. For now it would apply only to fast-food workers. For others, a \$10.10 hourly wage would be a "good starting place," according to Clinton.

There was more. "You may have heard that I am a fan of Chipotle," she said, "and it's not just because of



*We want to leave employers this much profit.*

their burrito bowl." She praised the restaurant for providing paid vacations and sick leave, plus tuition reimbursements, for its part-time workers. Paid leaves have the effect of replacing lost wages.

But there are economic downsides. A higher minimum wage causes employers to hire fewer workers than they would at a lower wage. Higher fringe benefits are costly to employers. "It makes it more expensive to hire workers," says Steve Moore of the Heritage Foundation. Those with more than 50 employees are already forced under Obamacare to provide health insurance. Like Sanders,

Clinton would pile on new costs of doing business.

In many cases, businesses have alternatives to paying for all this. They can automate, as banks and restaurants have and gas stations did long ago. Companies can hire part-time staff or contract employees to whom they are not obligated to pay benefits, health insurance, or pensions. Clinton would, in effect, incentivize alternatives.

Surely Clinton is aware of this. The phenomenon of reduced payrolls is all around her. She may not buy airline tickets online rather than from a ticket agent—she campaigns by private plane—but millions of "everyday" Americans do.

Clinton is also aware of the powerful economic impact a tax cut can have. When Bill Clinton was president, he reached a deal in 1997 with congressional Republicans to cut the rate on capital gains, the money earned from investments, from 28 percent to 20 percent. Gains doubled and tax revenues grew 50 percent between 1996 and 2001. And the federal budget was balanced twice.

Hillary Clinton was first lady when this occurred. It wasn't a secret. Yet she's now joined what has become "a religion" with leftist Democrats, Moore says, the belief that tax rates don't matter.

In other words, rates can be raised through the roof without slowing growth or reducing tax revenues.

So from Clinton we get a plan to double the capital gains rate in the first two years of an investment, then gradually decrease it to its current 20 percent over the next four years. This would come on top of the additional 2.3 percent rate already imposed to fund Obamacare. Clinton insists her scheme would encourage investors to make long-term investments and discourage them from bailing out too soon.

Is Clinton serious about this? Or is she merely trying to appease her party's left wing by proposing higher

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tax rates on Wall Street and wealthy investors? Sanders, her chief rival for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination, is hard to beat. He's declared himself comfortable with a top income tax rate of 70 percent (currently 39.6 percent). And he would lift the cap on income subject to the Social Security tax.

Given her strategy, Clinton isn't required to match Sanders tax hike for tax hike. She only has to somewhat reflect him. And for campaign purposes, she can get away with a proposal that has practically no chance of approval by Congress, ever.

My guess is Clinton will have difficulty explaining why her proposal is pertinent. Today's slow economic growth isn't the result of short-term investment. It's caused primarily by a shortage of investment, period. Her complicated capital gains tax plan would probably reduce investment even further.

Perhaps Clinton has lost touch with what works and what doesn't. "Don't let anybody . . . tell you that, you know, it's corporations and businesses that create jobs. You know, that old theory, trickle-down economics. That has been tried. That has failed." She's wrong. The supply-side tax cuts of Kennedy in the 1960s and Reagan in the 1980s supercharged the economy in their eras. Tax hikes never have.

The sad message of Clinton's surge to the left is that it signals the death of the "new" Democrats who joined Republicans to pass tax reform in 1986, cut the top income tax rate to 28 percent, and accelerate economic growth. Tax reform was approved in the Senate 97-3.

"Where are the Bill Bradleys and Dick Gephardts today?" Moore asks. "A Democrat who voted for a 28 percent top tax rate today would be run out of the party." Indeed, Sen. Bill Bradley and Rep. Dick Gephardt, early Democratic supporters of tax reform, are long gone.

Not only is Hillary Clinton still here, but she has created the strong impression that economics is not her strong suit. ♦

# They Hate Your Guts

Democrats and their voters.

BY P.J. O'ROURKE

I would like to address myself to the poor, the huddled masses, the wretched refugees teeming to America's shore, the homeless, the economically, socially, and mentally tempest-tossed. Also, I'd like to address the young, the hip, the progressive, the compassionate, and the caring. I'd like a word with everyone who votes for Democrats.

Democrats hate your guts.

Democrats need your vote and they'll do anything—no matter how low and degrading—to get it. They hate you the way a whore hates a john.

All politicians hate people. Politics is a way to gain power over people without justification for having that power. Nothing in the 11,000-year history of politics—going back to the governing elites of Mesopotamia—indicates that politicians are wiser, smarter, kinder, more moral, or better skilled at any craft (aside from politics) than we are.

But political rulers need the acquiescence of the ruled to slake the craving for power. Politicians hate you the way a junkie hates junk.

Politicians gain power by means of empty promises or threats, or both when they're on their game. Should you vote for people who are *good* at politics? No. You should vote for Republicans. We're lousy.

Believe me, I know why you *don't* vote for Republicans. You see the Republican candidates and they look so . . . Bush-League, Dog Walker, Rubio Rube, Get-Outta-the-Carson, Hucka-Upchuck, Ap-Paul-ling, Cruz Control, Fat-Fried Christie Crispy, Son-of-a-Kasich, Dingleberry Perry, Flee

the Fiorina, Sancta-Santorum, Graham Cracker, and Nervous 7/11 Night Shift Manager Jindal.

And never mind the busted flush Trump Card who should be spray-painted with Rust-Oleum primer, have a squirt gun super-glued to his hand, and kicked through the front door of the Ferguson, Mo., police station.

You think, "I don't want to vote for these people."

Just between you and me, we Republicans think the same thing.

Republican politicians stink. This is because real Republicans don't go into politics. We have a life. We have families, jobs, responsibilities, and it takes all our time and energy to avoid them and go play golf. We leave politics to our halt, our lame, and our feeble-minded. Republican candidacies are sinecures for members of the GOP who are otherwise useless and/or retired.

Democrats, on the other hand, are brilliant politicians. And I mean that as a vicious slur. Think how we use the word "politics." Are "office politics" ever a good thing? When somebody "plays politics" to get a promotion, does he or she deserve it? When we call a coworker "a real politician," is that a compliment?

"But," you say, "Republicans don't love us either." And we don't. As voters you are demographic groups. Republicans do not love demographic groups. Actually, Republicans do not love groups at all, with a few exceptions: The guys in the combat unit they commanded. Blood relations old enough to have been dead for years. Intimates of their private clubs. Golf buddies. Fellow guests at the Alfalfa dinner. And everybody in Bohemian Grove. But this love is proclaimed only

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after copious drink has been taken.

Loving you would mean Republicans are paying attention to you. We aren't. Republicans pay attention to only a few people:

- Members of their golf foursome
- Business-associate members of their golf foursome
- Investment adviser members of their golf foursome
- Members of other golf foursomes at the 19th hole
- Their spouses (that is, their most recent spouses, married for being rich or hot)
- Their children (except the artisanal pot grower in Mendocino who's shackled up with a holistic dance therapist—he's cut out of the will)

And in that order.

Democrats pay a lot of attention to you. They offer you all sorts of trick-or-treat giveaways.

Benefits are the way government is expanded. The more government expansion, the more opportunities for politicians to get power. (Beware of razor blades in the candy apples.)

Democrats offer you regulations to make your life safer from razor blades in candy apples. Regulations expand government with unelected regulatory bodies so that politicians can get power without bothering about your vote.

Democrats hate you now, but wait until they have you fully regulated and aren't even pretending to lick your Nikes, Birkenstocks, or Manolo Blahniks. (Nikes will be banned for exploitative overseas child labor. Manolo Blahniks will fall victim to a National Campaign to Improve Foot and Toe Health. And Birkenstocks—which never go away—will be found to be in violation of federal biodegradability standards.)

Democrats adore your demographic groups. Democrats are pro-woman, pro-black, pro-Latino, pro-immigrant, pro-LGBT, pro-AFL/CIO, pro-differently abled, pro-unemployed, pro-poor. (And by *pro* I mean *whore*.)

Besides prostituting themselves to your demographic groups, Democrats are adhering to the first principle of political elites: Divide and conquer.

The Democratic party is one big family. This means—as those of us from big families know—all of you detest each other. Or you will by the time Democratic matriarchs and patriarchs get done parceling out too little to one group, too much to another, and none to most. (Are you undocumented alien moms and children enjoying your summer internment camp?)

Democrats are particularly infatuated with the demographic group of voters who are poor. Democrats provide many social programs for the poor. If you happen to be poor, you know what these social programs do. They pay you to stay poor.

Democrats favor a higher minimum wage. And they'll make sure you get a minimum wage. Forever.

Democrats want to give you health care that's free—and worth it.

Democrats will provide you with more opportunities to get an education and buy a house. A couple hundred thousand dollars of student loan debt and a huge mortgage that's underwater will keep you poor for sure.

## The Affordable Care Act's Ironic Excise Tax

**By Thomas J. Donohue**

President and CEO  
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

The Affordable Care Act is now the law of the land. But some of its provisions are so flawed that they actually undermine key objectives of the law, which if the name is to be believed, include providing affordable health coverage to more Americans. That's why the 40% excise tax that penalizes employers for providing high-value coverage, resulting in higher costs for patients, is a head-scratcher.

Beginning in 2018, a 40% tax will be applied to the value of employer-sponsored health care plans that exceed a threshold of \$10,200 for individuals and \$27,500 for families. And it's only a matter of time until this tax intended to hit high-cost group health plans takes aim at the vast majority of policyholders covered under virtually all group health plans.

Why? Because the thresholds will grow at the rate of inflation instead of the rate of health care costs. But price increases for

health care have consistently outpaced the average rate of inflation across the economy. This means that over time, more and more health plans—including lower value options—will be subject to the 40% tax.

What's at stake? Affordable health insurance for the 150 million Americans who receive coverage through their employer. Employer-sponsored health care coverage through the workforce has long been revered as the most stable, innovative, and preferred venue for individuals to obtain health coverage.

In fact, employer-sponsored coverage was viewed as so central to the current system that the authors of the Affordable Care Act chose to build on it by requiring all employers with 50 or more employees to provide minimum value coverage to their employees and dependents or face a penalty. But under the 40% excise tax, the very same employers will face a penalty if that mandated coverage exceeds the inadequately indexed dollar thresholds. Damned if they do, damned if they don't.

Unfortunately, it's the employees who

will ultimately pay—either through lost coverage options or higher costs. To avoid or minimize the impact of yet another tax stemming from the health care law, many employers have no choice but to consider raising deductibles or other cost-sharing provisions, implementing a consumer-directed health plan in lieu of the employer-sponsored coverage many workers are accustomed to, or dropping high-value plans. And if that doesn't shield them from the costly tax, they could resort to more drastic measures, like eliminating coverage altogether.

The 40% tax on health care plans is yet another example of how the Affordable Care Act has failed to curb rising costs. It may be the law of the land, but if this provision is allowed to stand, it will only push costs higher—and it will steadily unravel employer-sponsored coverage, the backbone of our system.



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And then Democrats tax the hell out of your beer and cigarettes—two of the few small pleasures available to the poor.

Democrats are tough on business. After all, you might get into business. And make money. And vote Republican.

Money is all Republicans care about, say Democrats. That's not true. We care about other things. We care about stocks, bonds, precious metals, commodities, mergers and acquisitions, arbitrage, and hedge funds.

And we care about you personally. If you happen to have a large amount of money to invest in our hedge fund. Actually, we care about you anyway—if you're of any use to us. Just the way you care about strangers—if they're of any use to you. This is a good, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, side to human nature. Politics is the other side.

And even if we don't care about you—because of our inability to care or your inability to be cared for—at least we'll leave you alone.

Democrats will herd you into a group. Democrats like groups because they loathe individuals. Any given group can be made dependent on political power. Any given individual is a different matter.

Democrats are in favor of abortion and against the death penalty. How could anyone possibly arrive at that pair of moral judgments? Republicans can, sometimes, understand the majesty of death—abortion as a matter of private conscience and evil paying the ultimate price. Republicans can, sometimes, understand the sacredness of life—each fetus as a being and how we must not take what we cannot give from any person, however bad. But no Republican understands the virtue of killing a baby too innocent to be born while sheltering and feeding a murderer until he gets fed up and tunnels out of Dannemora.

Democrats hate you. And your family. Sixty-nine percent of America's abortions are performed on women who are poor. More than half of the people in prison report pre-arrest annual incomes of less than \$10,000.

A fetus is an individual who might

grow up to be anything, even a Republican. Meanwhile convicts are a group that is fully dependent on government. (And in Vermont, felons in prison can vote by absentee ballot, which may explain Bernie Sanders.) “Wait!” you say. “Republicans are just as bad! Look at the Republican candidates trying to attract votes from segregationists, male chauvinists, gun nuts, religious lunatics, transgender-bashers, Nazis, climate-change-deniers, union-busters, flagrant emitters of greenhouse gases, and Wall Street malefactors of great wealth.”

Yep. There our candidates are, trolling through the gutters of the electorate. That's what politics does to people. It sullies even the most well-bred fellow and gal. Especially if they happen to be halt, lame, feeble-minded, or otherwise useless and/or retired and have therefore taken up politics.

Stay away from politics. And vote Republican. As it says in *Forrest Gump* (the book's author, Winston Groom, is a Republican), “Stupid is as stupid does.” And you can count on us Republicans to not do much. ♦

# Fixing the Court

Priority number one for the next president?

BY TERRY EASTLAND

**T**ed Cruz, who in 1996 clerked for then-chief justice William Rehnquist and is now a first-term senator and GOP presidential candidate, has assumed the leadership of conservatives aiming to rein in a Supreme Court they fault for imposing on the country rights not found in the Constitution. This is hardly a new issue for conservatives; in a past now faraway, it was also an issue for some liberals.

What accounts for the fresh concern about judicial activism is a sense among conservatives that during its past term the Court “crossed a line,” as Cruz put it during a recent hearing on the topic held by the Judiciary Committee subcommittee he chairs, on federal rights and federal courts. The line-crossing case Cruz had mainly in mind was *Obergefell v. Hodges*, in which a five-justice majority read into the Constitution a right to same-sex marriage, usurping the constitutional right of the people to decide the marriage question. “People can disagree over this issue,” said the

Texas senator, “but it has always been left to the people to decide.”

Cruz and his colleagues heard testimony that more decisions like *Obergefell* could be in the offing. The legal writer Ed Whelan told the subcommittee there is now “no rewriting of the Constitution that is beyond the bounds of the possible if something matters to the left and there are five or more living-constitutionalist justices on the Court.” The living-constitutionalist approach to interpreting the Constitution is actually not to interpret it—at least not according to text and history and structure—but to read into it understandings that are in none of those traditional sources and which today are invariably “progressive.”

Whelan said, “The list of possible living-constitutionalist innovations is endless,” and offered several: “Voting rights for illegal aliens; taxpayer funding of abortion and of sex-change operations; mandatory equalized spending for public-school districts; a right to welfare payments above the poverty line; and a right to have multiple spouses.”

In the hearing, titled “With Prejudice: Supreme Court Activism and

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Possible Solutions,” the subcommittee focused on structural matters. It heard testimony as to how the judiciary, famously anticipated by Alexander Hamilton as “the weakest of the three departments of government,” has over the years become much more powerful, such that it could render a decision like *Obergefell* (and before it *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 case that read into the Constitution a right to abortion, taking that issue from the citizens of the states).

As explained at the hearing by Chapman University law professor John Eastman, the original constitutional provisions meant to check and balance the Supreme Court, including the power to impeach justices, have failed to do so. Not incidentally, in his dissent in *Obergefell*, Justice Samuel Alito read the Court’s history in a similar fashion: “Today’s decision shows that decades of attempts to restrain this Court’s abuse of its authority have failed.”

Might some new attempt to restrain the Court work? Most of the ideas identified at the hearing would necessitate amending the Constitution as provided for in Article V, a two-step process requiring the *proposal* of an amendment (by a two-thirds vote of both houses or a convention called by Congress upon request of the legislatures of two-thirds of the states) and then its *ratification* (by legislatures of, or conventions in, three-quarters of the states).

In his testimony, Whelan summarized the “types” of structural amendments that deserve attention. First, Article V could be amended to make it easier to change the Constitution—and thus to reject lawless Supreme Court decisions. A second type of amendment would enable Congress or the aggregate of state legislatures to directly invalidate a particular Supreme Court decision—with the deed done by a supermajority in each house of Congress or a supermajority of the state legislatures.

A third type of amendment would provide a means for removing lawless justices. Cruz himself has already proposed an amendment of this type, one that would subject the justices to periodic judicial-retention elections. A fourth type of amendment would

impose term limits on the justices. That idea has been battled around for decades, with an 18-year term the one most commonly recommended. Under such an amendment, one justice would step down from the Court every two years.

While Cruz’s interest in structural reform is evident, he has taken on a hard task. Some of the proposals discussed in the subcommittee need work, including Cruz’s own, which does not say whether current justices would be “grandfathered in” and thus made exempt from the retention elections. And the amendment process itself, with its supermajority requirements, is a place where proposals seem to go to die: Since 1789, according to *The Heritage Guide to the Constitution*, more than 5,000 bills proposing amendments have been introduced in Congress, with 33 sent to the states for ratification. And no attempt by the states to call a convention has ever succeeded, though some have come within one or two states of the two-thirds requirement.

One topic the subcommittee didn’t discuss was the appointment of new justices, the means for which, of course, are already spelled out in the Constitution. Yet in filling a vacancy, a president

can respond to a Court whose approach to judging he disagrees with.

Currently the Court is more sharply divided in terms of judicial philosophy than it ever has been. There are four judicial liberals (Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elena Kagan) and four judicial conservatives (Justices Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas, John Roberts, and Alito), the ninth justice being Anthony Kennedy, a man of variable legal views who wrote for the *Obergefell* majority (which included the four liberals).

The next president may well have the opportunity to nominate and appoint one or more justices in a first term and thereby shift (to the right or left, depending on who leaves and who arrives) the philosophical direction of the Court. Cruz would like to be that president, but so would a truckload of others in his party. The Court promises to become more of an issue in the presidential race than it often is, with the question for the country whether the living constitutionalism of *Obergefell* is to be perpetuated by new justices or finally brought to a halt by a Court with new appointees who have the courage to stand their ground. ♦

# Dangerous Apathy

Barbarism in our time.

BY WESLEY J. SMITH

**T**he country has been roiled in recent weeks by videos showing two Planned Parenthood executives chirpily telling pro-life undercover investigators that fetal organs could be had for a price. The executives—both themselves abortionists—explained that their techniques could be adapted to “crush” fetuses in

a “less crunchy” manner so as to better insure harvests suitable for research.

There have, of course, been previous scandals involving the selling of aborted fetal body parts, complete with price lists. In 2000, ABC’s *20/20* conducted a three-month investigation that, according to the press release, “uncovered an industry in which tissue and organs from aborted fetuses, donated to help medical research, are being marketed for hundreds, sometimes thousands of dollars.” Forced to revisit those practices, Americans

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again confront the crassness and cruelty of the culture of death. Yet as in the past, there is a dismaying likelihood that today's horror will fade into tomorrow's shrugging acceptance.

The Terri Schiavo case was the classic example. Before her case made international headlines, profoundly cognitively disabled patients were legally and routinely dehydrated to death by the removal of feeding tubes, defined as "stopping unwanted medical treatment." But dehydration mostly happened in the shadows, with occasional cases causing a ripple of news, often as a result of intra-family legal disputes.

Terri's case was different. It generated an unprecedented amount of public attention—particularly after her family humanized her by posting online a video of Terri smiling at her mother. People could no longer claim they "didn't know" or that it "could never happen here." The choice was plain: Should public policy support Terri's parents' desire to maintain her life or her husband Michael's desire to see her dead? Alas, after the smoke cleared—and even though Michael was engaged to, lived with, and had sired children by another woman when he obtained a court's permission to end Terri's life—polls showed that Americans supported the court order removing her feeding tube.

That was an epochal moment. In the wake of Terri's death in 2005, efforts to prevent such slow-motion killings collapsed, and a new frontier opened in the culture of death. Already some bioethicists are arguing that Alzheimer's patients should be starved to death by nursing homes—even if they willingly eat—if they so request in an advance medical directive.

The Planned Parenthood brouhaha also brings to mind the progressive acceptance of the late Jack Kevorkian's campaign for assisted suicide. When Kevorkian helped cause Janet Adkins's death in 1990—she had early Alzheimer's disease but was healthy enough to beat her son at tennis the week before she died—many were shocked. The

media coverage was generally critical. Kevorkian was even condemned as "outrageous" in a *New York Times* editorial that urged authorities to "go after" him. (Today, the *Times* is a booster of assisted suicide.)

Following the now-familiar pattern, heated resistance to Kevorkian soon faltered. As years passed—with a few juries refusing to convict based on the specious defense that Kevorkian didn't intend people to die but merely wanted to end their suffering—he grew bolder. Eventually Kevorkian became so



A protest against the removal of Terri Schiavo's feeding tube in Pinellas Park, Florida, October 25, 2003. The photo at right shows Terri with her mother in 2001.

mainstream that in 1998 he was an honored guest at *Time* magazine's 75th anniversary party, where Tom Cruise rushed up to shake his hand.

Little noted in the narrative the media constructed around Kevorkian as a quirky savior of the terminally ill was the fact that few of Kevorkian's subjects were actually dying. Indeed, studies showed that at least 70 percent of those who sucked the carbon monoxide machine in the back of Kevorkian's rusty van or were hooked up to his "Thanatron," as he called his assisted suicide machine, were not terminally ill when they traveled to Michigan to die. More: The autopsies of at least five of Kevorkian's victims showed no underlying illness whatsoever.

In 1999, Kevorkian even stripped Joseph Tushkowsky's kidneys from his dead body after assisting in his suicide, offering them at a press conference on a "first come, first served" basis. Although Kevorkian wrote in

*Prescription Medicide* that his ultimate goal was the vivisection of those being euthanized, he remained a popular figure with seeming license to assist suicides at will.

Kevorkian finally overstepped. After videotaping himself lethally injecting an ALS patient, he was convicted of murder and imprisoned. But once released, he joined the celebrity circuit, raking in \$50,000 a speech, as the purveyors of popular culture transformed him into a harmless Muppet figure. He was played in a hagiographic biopic by A-list movie star Al Pacino.

Today, we see increased advocacy for legalizing assisted suicide and euthanasia throughout the world—this despite the fact that Belgian, Dutch, and Swiss suicide clinics are taking the agenda to its logical conclusion by euthanizing the mentally ill. A study published recently in the *British Medical Journal* found that of 100 mentally ill patients who asked for euthanasia in Belgium, 35 were killed by doctors. Most of those who lived changed their minds about desiring death.

Think about that: A practice that not long ago was deemed a serious crime—doctors killing the suicidal—is now reported without criticism in a leading journal. In Belgium and the Netherlands, euthanasia of the disabled and mentally ill is now coupled with organ harvesting, with case studies published in transplant journals. And in our own country, the abortion industry is right in step.

It is all too familiar: When harsh truths about medicalized killing—whether of the unborn, the mentally ill, or the suicidal—first come to light, people are shocked, and calls for reform ring out. But indignation soon cools into resigned apathy.

Will the same moral enervation sap public outrage at Planned Parenthood's offer of less crunchy abortions to facilitate organ harvesting? Have Americans' moral sensibilities really been so dulled by relativism that we no longer know a barbaric act when we see one?



# Putinformation

## Russian propaganda in the age of postmodernism.

BY LEON ARON

Traveling recently in what might be called “new front-line” states—Estonia, Ukraine, and Moldova—I was struck by the depth of concern I encountered about Russian propaganda. And not just propaganda aimed at the Russian population and neighboring countries. At a conference in Tallinn, a *Politico* reporter and experienced Russia hand who had just covered the parliamentary elections in Britain told me voters he’d interviewed in Wales and Scotland had brought up clearly identifiable pieces of propaganda spread by Russia’s state-owned global television and radio network, RT. In the United States, the State Department and Congress have been sufficiently concerned about the Kremlin’s worldwide propaganda offensive to advocate increases in budgets for U.S. public diplomacy, which includes international broadcasting.

And for good reason. The Russian propaganda machine is being credited with almost magical powers of penetration and persuasion. NATO’s military commander, General Philip Breedlove, has called it “the most amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen.” David Remnick, editor of the *New Yorker*, who covered the last years of the Soviet Union for the *Washington Post*, calls RT “darkly, nastily brilliant, so much more sophisticated than Soviet propaganda.”

Indeed, the global reach of Russian propaganda is impressive. RT, the flagship operation, broadcasts news and talk shows in five major languages with a potential audience of over 700 million

people in 100 countries. It also garners a significant following on YouTube. In December 2014, RT announced that its family of YouTube channels had racked up 2 billion total views, besting such media titans as CNN and Al Jazeera by sizable margins. Launched last year, the Sputnik news network plans to broadcast in 30 languages in 34 countries.

Then there is the shadow army of Kremlin-paid Internet “trolls” who closely monitor social media as well as major Western news sites, ready to pounce on critics of the Kremlin. The aim of the Kremlin’s messaging, as one expert put it, is “not to persuade (as in classic public diplomacy) or earn credibility but to sow confusion via conspiracy theories and proliferate falsehoods.” These outlets echo Kremlin narratives, while using conspiracy theories and anti-Western rhetoric to appeal to segments of their audience that are skeptical of official narratives, notably the far left and the far right.

Sold as an “objective” alternative to Western media expressing the Russian point of view, this is propaganda in the guise of factual reporting. “Question more” is RT’s official slogan. Naturally, RT never identifies itself as created and funded by the Russian government.

The overarching objective seems to be less to bolster the “Russia brand” than to degrade the reputation of the West and thus deny it the moral high ground. Yes, we are corrupt, yes, we are authoritarian, incompetent—but look at your own governments! At least we don’t lecture others! You won’t catch us pontificating about “democracy” and “human rights.”

Thus, when the CEO of the French oil company Total, who had vociferously opposed economic sanctions on Russia, was killed when his plane slammed into a snowplow operated by a drunken driver at a Moscow airport,

Russian commentators asserted that he had been assassinated by the CIA.

Or try looking for information on the web about the growing presence of Russian nationals among ISIS fighters in Syria and Iraq. You’ll find your way quickly to one of Russia’s most popular Facebook-style sites, VKontakte.ru. There you’ll see, pictured in the sidebar at the top of the page, a cartoonish Uncle Sam holding a baby jihadist clad in the familiar black uniform with a Kalashnikov on its back. The caption: “ISIS is a creation of America’s two-party system.”

This effort is generously funded. This year the Kremlin bankrolled RT to the tune of \$400 million, while the global news agency Rossiya Segodnya (Russia Today) received \$170 million. For comparison, Voice of America’s budget this year is \$212 million and that of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty \$104 million—in a country whose GDP is nine times Russia’s.

Generously funded, slick, and unconstrained by moral scruples, Russian propaganda nevertheless owes some of its ostensible success to a powerful factor not of its own making.

After Russia invaded Ukraine, Secretary of State John Kerry complained that Moscow was guided by 19th-century ideas. But it turns out that when a 19th-century mentality clashes with a 21st-century one, it is the former that has certain advantages in the struggle to control the narrative—at least initially. This is because the dragon’s teeth of Russian propaganda fall into soil already prepared by postmodern attitudes, especially among the West’s political, media, and cultural elites.

Long before it got its name, postmodernism was anticipated by Friedrich Nietzsche’s two postulates: “God is dead” and “There are no facts, only interpretations.”

This is hardly a coincidence. For if God be dead (and Nietzsche used God as a metaphor for a universal system of ethical imperatives) and, as a result, we have to choose our own personal ethics, then by definition one choice is no better than any other. No one is right or wrong, just different—“diverse,” as we

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would put it. And truth, which used to be considered the foundation of both virtue and beauty, is also relative.

By now several generations of elites in the United States and Europe have been reared on notions of morality and truth splintered into myriad personal choices. Writing in the *New York Times* four months ago, an American philosophy professor complained that students do not, as he put it, believe in “moral facts.” They recognize only “moral claims”: opinions that are true or not true only “relative to a culture.” (This should not come as a surprise: History, which used to teach these “moral facts” by example, is now also suspect as “constructed narrative,” a form of fiction.)

Even as it has weakened its moral defenses against propaganda, the West has been made intellectually vulnerable by postmodern epistemology, which is just as uncertain about what sources of knowledge are valid. “The medium is the message,” Marshall McLuhan taught in the 1960s. Fifty years later, the message is increasingly detached from the medium, words from those who utter them. As postmodernism postulates, “There is no author, there is only the text.”

There are “two sides to every story,” both presumed equally valid. Asked why the privately owned First Baltic Channel had chosen to air Russian television’s main newscast, *Vremya*, in prime time, in Latvia and Estonia, while Euronews, founded by the European Broadcasting Union of public service broadcasters, was on at 6 A.M. and midnight, the spokeswoman for the channel replied, “There is no such thing as objective fact.”

Did the U.S. government orchestrate 9/11? Twenty-three percent of Germans thought so, as did 15 percent of Italians. Seven years after the fall of the Twin Towers, between a quarter and one-fifth of Britons, French, and Italians told pollsters they had no idea who was behind the attack. Well, then: Did the CIA help the Ukrainians shoot down the MH 17 Malaysian airliner (as suggested by Russian propaganda)? Plausible. Did the Russian opposition kill its own leader, Boris Nemtsov, to

embarrass Putin? Conceivable. Almost one in three Germans were reported last month to find Russia not responsible for the violence in Ukraine.

Relations between states are similarly affected. Whether in Minsk or Lausanne, promises and treaties are divorced from the credibility of the regimes that sign them, as if the word of a dictator were just as valid as the word of the freely elected and accountable leader of a liberal democracy.

With right and wrong derided as subjective value judgments, entire concepts seem to disappear—concepts civilization has relied on for millennia. “Just” wars and “aggression” are all but gone from the vocabularies of the elite Western media. Only “conflicts”



*And Friedrich begat Vladimir.*

remain—with the obvious corollary that both sides are equally at fault. So wishing for the “victory” of one side is not done in polite society. By contrast, “peace,” no matter how short-lived, fraudulent, or beneficial to the aggressor, is to be sought at any cost.

This creates an enormous disadvantage for the postmodern West: It wants peace; the other side wants victory.

There is what might be called a belief imbalance in the East-West struggle to control the narrative of past and contemporary events: As Yeats put it famously, one side lacks “all conviction,” while the other is full of “passionate intensity.” For while Putin’s propaganda flourishes amid the fragmentation and provisionality of postmodern thought, the Kremlin admits no relativity to the credo that guides its leader in his historic mission.

Putin gives every indication of believing passionately that Russia has never been wrong, only wronged. The end of the Cold War, as he sees it, is Russia’s equivalent of the post-World

War I Treaty of Versailles for Germany: the source of endless humiliation and misery. Following his favorite philosopher, Ivan Ilyn, Putin knows that the nefarious West plots against Russia, jealous of her incorruptible and saintly soul as well as her size, riches, and most of all exceptionalism, a God-given destiny and historic mission as the Third Rome, the light among nations. He believes that Russia’s very sovereignty is in danger, and Ukraine, in Putin’s words, is “NATO’s foreign legion.” With his spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, he believes that he, Putin, is “the defender of Russians wherever they live,” and with his deputy chief of staff, Vyacheslav Volodin, he proclaims that “there is no Russia without Putin.”

True, we are not in Cold War II. We don’t face a centrally directed global network of states and movements guided by a coherent millenarian ideology. But we ought not deceive ourselves regarding the time and effort it might take to prevail in our current confrontation with an ideologically inflamed, even messianic, highly personalistic autocracy that seeks to correct alleged historic “wrongs” and expand its “sphere of influence,” if necessary by invasion and annexation, and armed with 1,582 strategic nuclear warheads.

After all, the elites who fought Cold War I believed in the superiority of their political, economic, and cultural systems. They believed in liberty, human rights, and democracy as the foundation of human dignity, and they affirmed it with a depth of conviction that might appear out of place today. More important, the millions of voters who lent these leaders their support—over decades, freely and democratically—believed in these things as well.

In the end, the West is likely to prevail in the new confrontation with Putin’s Russia, whatever label history attaches to it, because eventually dignity and truth tend to prevail over dishonor and lies. This is what happened to the Soviet Union when its people withdrew their support from the regime.

But we ought to be aware of the considerable handicaps with which we enter the battle.

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# The Guns of August 1990

*A quarter-century after Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, we still haven't learned the right lessons from that war*

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BY VANCE SERCHUK

Just after midnight on August 2, 1990, an invasion force of approximately 100,000 Iraqi troops crossed into Kuwait. As mechanized and armored Republican Guard divisions breached the border and sped southward across the desert, Iraqi Special Forces commandos launched airborne and amphibious assaults into Kuwait City. The Kuwaiti military, outnumbered and taken by surprise by the well-coordinated offensive, was swiftly routed. By nightfall that first day, the country's main bases and international airport were in Iraqi hands, as was the palace of the Kuwaiti emir, who narrowly escaped to Saudi Arabia. Within 48 hours, the occupation of Kuwait—proclaimed by Saddam Hussein to be Iraq's long-lost 19th province—was largely complete.

This month marks the 25th anniversary of these events—the first major international crisis to confront the United States as the Cold War drew to a close, and one that culminated a few months later in America's biggest war since Vietnam.

To leaders and policymakers at the time, it was taken for granted that the invasion of Kuwait, and the international response with which it was met, would carry far-reaching strategic consequences. Today, by contrast, the significance of the Gulf war is less obvious. In a world of transnational terrorist networks, resilient insurgencies, and hybridized warfare, much about the conflict seems like a relic from a bygone age—from its tank battles to the very notion that a war could be decisively won or lost over a couple of days by conventional armies clashing on open ground. For this reason, there is a temptation to remember Desert Storm a bit wistfully, as America's last great triumph of the 20th century, rather than the opening act of the 21st.

This, however, would be a mistake. For all that the events of 1990-1991 feel distant from the problems of the present, the invasion of Kuwait very much did mark the dawn of a new period in U.S. foreign policy—one that, in key respects, continues to this day.

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First, starting with the Gulf crisis, the most pressing tests for international order and U.S. leadership would emerge disproportionately from the greater Middle East, rather than the traditional incubators of upheaval—the geopolitical hothouses of Europe and Asia—where the United States had previously fought all of its major foreign wars. While challenges elsewhere would compete for Washington's attention in the years after Desert Storm—including the disintegration of Yugoslavia, periodic tensions with North Korea, and the rise of China—it has been the problems of the Middle East that, rightfully or not, have dominated the U.S. diplomatic and security agenda during this period.

Second and relatedly, the Gulf crisis commenced the entry of the American military into the modern Middle East in a big way for the first time. Since the British withdrawal from east of Suez in the early 1970s, the United States had been gradually drawn into the vacuum left in London's wake. This process was accelerated by the multiple crises of 1979—the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian revolution foremost among them—which inspired the Carter administration to establish a joint military task force for the region, an arrangement that would grow into U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). Later in the 1980s came the dispatch of U.S. peacekeepers to Sinai under the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement, the ill-fated Marine mission to Lebanon, and naval skirmishes with Iran.

But these were relatively modest or transient deployments. At the moment that Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, CENTCOM—in contrast to its European and Pacific counterparts—had no assigned forces of its own; it was a combatant command without combatants, composed of a planning headquarters in Florida and little else.

The Gulf war changed all of that, as nearly half a million troops surged into the Arabian peninsula to protect the Saudis and then liberate Kuwait. Even more important, a year after the ceasefire with the Iraqis, tens of thousands of American forces remained in the region, deployed in newly built desert garrisons and on ships offshore—part of a new force posture designed to contain a weakened yet still treacherous Saddam Hussein. Those troop numbers would soar under the George W.



Bush and Obama administrations, with the dispatch of over 150,000 forces to Iraq and then another 100,000 to Afghanistan, before sharply falling off again. Yet even at the peak of the Obama administration's military drawdown from the Middle East, before the rise of the Islamic State, CENTCOM still had tens of thousands of "enduring" forces in its area of responsibility—and that is without counting the U.S. presence in Afghanistan.

Here, then, is another lasting product of the Gulf war: While the Obama administration in recent years has trumpeted a "pivot" to Asia, it was the invasion of Kuwait that precipitated the real military rebalance of the past quarter-century—a large-scale relocation of U.S. planes, ships, and personnel to the Middle East. The American military marched into the Gulf in late 1990 to evict the Iraqis from Kuwait, and it has never really left.

Yet perhaps the most instructive legacy of the Gulf war for the present day can be discovered in the conduct of the conflict itself. Indeed, a careful study of the U.S. response to the invasion of Kuwait reveals many of the elements that would characterize—and bedevil—the exercise of American power over the next quarter-century, including some of the recurring blind-spots and biases that would afflict subsequent administrations, Democratic and Republican alike.

In this respect, a review of the Gulf crisis—far from an exercise in nostalgia—provides an eerily prescient preview of the problems of America's post-Cold War foreign policy. It also raises a host of unsettling and urgent questions about how much we have learned in the past 25 years, not only about the Middle East but about ourselves.

## THE TEMPTATION OF THE GOLDEN KEY

In the weeks after Kuwait's capture by the Iraqis, President George H. W. Bush sought to make sense of the situation by invoking a familiar and powerful historical analogy. Allowing the Iraqi invasion to stand, he warned, risked a repetition of the mistake made in the 1930s: Much as appeasement of Hitler by the Western democracies had only fed Nazi appetites, failure to confront Saddam's conquest of Kuwait would invite further aggression by him and other rapacious dictators. By contrast, swift and decisive international action to evict the Iraqis from Kuwait would not only right an egregious wrong; it could define the character of post-Cold War geopolitics, cementing what Bush would later call a "new world order" of great power peace and cooperation.

This would not be the last time an American leader looked to Iraq and saw the country as the proving grounds for a broader doctrine. Over the next quarter-century, this would include, *inter alia*, the notion that, by ousting Saddam for his defiance over WMD and support for terrorism, the United States could set an example that would bring

other rogue regimes to heel; that, by midwifing democracy in Iraq, the United States could inspire its spread across the rest of the Arab world; and that, by exiting Iraq, the United States could reduce tensions with Muslims worldwide and usher in a new period of diminished military entanglement in the Middle East.

To be sure, Iraq is not the only place where post-Cold War presidents have hoped to find a magic domino that, when toppled, would cause a succession of other longstanding challenges to tumble their way. The evergreen faith that, if only an Israeli-Palestinian settlement could be reached, the region's other problems would suddenly shrivel in size, is another. So too is the belief, now ascendant, that a nuclear agreement with Iran will enable a cascade of other Middle Eastern conflicts to be settled.

The only thing as persistent as this kind of thinking in U.S. foreign policy over the past 25 years has been its failure to work—nowhere more spectacularly than Iraq.

In the first instance, the Gulf war proved to be every bit the model of international cooperation that the elder President Bush envisioned—a vast multinational coalition, blessed by the U.N. Security Council and with the hard-won acquiescence of Moscow. Yet it was a fleeting moment of solidarity—one that quickly proved impossible to sustain or reconstruct as subsequent crises flared. Nor did Saddam Hussein's battlefield rout provide much of a deterrent to bad actors, whether Slobodan Milosevic or Osama bin Laden or Saddam himself, all of whom convinced themselves that political weakness lurked behind America's technological superiority. Iraq was successfully driven from Kuwait, but the hoped-for new world order was nowhere to be found.

Subsequent attempts to convert U.S. actions in Iraq into universal coin would prove no more successful. Ousting Saddam Hussein in 2003, while it helped convince Muammar Qaddafi to abandon his nuclear project and temporarily intimidated the Iranians into freezing or slowing elements of their program, failed to curb overall proliferation trends; the next decade would witness historic nuclear advances by the rogue regimes in Pyongyang and Tehran and a near-breakthrough by Syria. Nor, nearly a decade later, would Obama's military exit from Iraq result in a receding "tide of war"—quite the opposite.

This, then, is the first cautionary lesson from the Gulf war: American presidents and policymakers over the past 25 years have repeatedly gone in search of a "slam dunk"—a clear win that would ratify a broader set of rules and norms, validate a doctrine, and lower the cost of solving bigger problems. Iraq has repeatedly offered this prospect—a kind of golden key that, once pocketed, could be used to unlock solutions to a range of other, even more intractable national security challenges. It has yet to work as planned. In many cases, the initial effort faltered in Iraq, but even when a

degree of success has been achieved there, it has proven of limited throw-weight elsewhere.

## **FAILURES OF INTELLIGENCE, FAILURES OF IMAGINATION**

**T**he Gulf war is principally remembered for the success that the U.S. military achieved on the battlefield, epitomized by the precision airstrikes and lightning ground offensive that eviscerated Saddam's once-fearsome war machine. What is less remembered is that it was a conflict that began and ended with the United States being caught by surprise.

Right up until the moment that the Iraqis crossed into Kuwait, the consensus within the U.S. government was that an Iraqi invasion was unlikely. "War weary Iraq will pose a military threat to small neighboring states . . . but will be reluctant to engage in foreign military adventures," a classified Pentagon paper in 1989 predicted, according to Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor's indispensable history of the conflict, *The Generals' War*.

The problem was not a lack of satellite photos or human reporting that Iraqi units were massing along the Kuwaiti border. Rather, what lulled the Bush administration into complacency were the intellectual blinders of policymakers, who believed that Arab countries simply didn't invade each other. This bias was reinforced by high-level conversations with regional leaders—including Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, King Fahd in Saudi Arabia, and King Hussein of Jordan—who assured their White House and State Department interlocutors that Saddam was bluffing and couldn't possibly intend to seize Kuwait. They were wrong.

The second, equally big surprise came at the end of the conflict. To the extent the Bush administration gave much thought to the effect that smashing Saddam's Kuwait occupation force would have on dynamics inside Iraq, it expected it would precipitate an internal coup that would replace Saddam with another Sunni strongman—overthrowing the discredited dictator but preserving the dictatorship, and, with it, internal stability.

Wrong again. Instead of a palace putsch, Desert Storm set off a prison riot—as Shiite Arabs and Kurds trapped in Saddam's jailhouse seized the opportunity to rise up. American officials were once again caught flatfooted, as Iraq's diminished yet still formidable forces wheeled back on the offensive, this time directing firepower against their own people—including with helicopter gunships that U.S. military commanders had absentmindedly allowed Baghdad to keep flying under the terms of the ceasefire.

Both cases—Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and the mass uprisings against him—were partly failures of U.S. intelligence. But even more profoundly, they were failures of U.S. imagination.

This would prove to be a distressingly frequent feature of American foreign policy over the decades ahead, nowhere more so than in Iraq. American leaders would again and again be shocked and awed by unforeseen developments there—by the progress and scope of Iraqi WMD programs revealed in the wake of Desert Storm, and then by the absence of these programs after 2003; by the furies of insurgency and sectarianism that sprang up after Saddam's dictatorship was pulled down; and, more recently, by the lightning advance of the Islamic State across the country and the similarly swift collapse of the Iraqi army.

Here then is another hard lesson from the first Gulf war for the post-Cold War world: The foreign policy establishment tends to assume the future will resemble the past; to fail to imagine—much less seriously plan for—contingencies that do not conform to its biases, expectations, and ideological predispositions; and to thus be taken by strategic surprise, from 9/11 to the Arab Spring, but nowhere more spectacularly or tragically than in the "Land of the Two Rivers."

## **KURDISH LESSONS**

**T**he aim of the Gulf war was fundamentally conservative: to defend a regional order that Iraqi aggression threatened to upend. An internationally recognized border had been erased; it had to be reimposed. An internationally recognized state had been obliterated; it had to be restored. In contrast to the George W. Bush administration in 2003, which saw the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime as a spur to transformational change in Middle Eastern societies—"a forward strategy of freedom"—the George H. W. Bush administration had no revisionist agenda for the domestic affairs of Arab lands.

Yet the first Gulf war nonetheless had a revolutionary effect on the map of the Middle East: the creation, for the first time in modern history, of an autonomous, self-governing Kurdish state, in fact if not in law. When we talk today about the dissolution of the post-World War I borders and state structures of the Middle East, this was arguably one of the first boulders of the avalanche now rumbling across the region—and it was kicked loose by Desert Storm.

As with so much in the Middle East, this happened by accident, not design. While the Shiite revolt was put down by Saddam's forces in the spring of 1991, a destabilizing flood of Kurdish refugees into Turkey—and the ghastly images of their plight broadcast worldwide—prodded Washington into belated action. A U.S.-enforced safe zone was established in northern Iraq, in which the Kurds—those long-suffering losers of the contemporary Middle East, promised a country by the victorious allies in 1920 only to be betrayed three years later under the Treaty of Lausanne—were afforded the chance to rule themselves.

The aftermath of the Gulf war thus marks the start of the ascent of the Kurds as a significant geopolitical factor in the Middle East—a trend that continues to reshape the region, not only in Iraq but also in Syria and Turkey. Kurdish empowerment would never become an explicit or primary goal of U.S. intervention in the region, but it has repeatedly ended up being its consequence. (Notably, what policymakers assumed would materialize in 1991, but didn't—a decent, viable, alternative Sunni leadership—would prove a recurring stumbling block for U.S. strategy in Iraq and beyond.)

The trajectory of Iraqi Kurds after the Gulf war would prove prophetic for the region in another respect. As the first place anywhere in the Middle East where a dictator lost his grip on power through the combination of an indigenous uprising and U.S. intervention, Iraqi Kurdistan got a 20-year head start on the experiment in post-authoritarian self-government called the Arab Spring. The Kurdish experience foreshadowed many of the difficulties that would later confront and confound others.

Life after Saddam Hussein began hopefully for the Iraqi Kurds, with the newly liberated territory successfully holding elections. But the vote revealed a society deeply split between rival factions. An attempt at power-sharing between the two major parties soon broke down, and Iraqi Kurdistan fell into civil war, which then pulled in most of the neighboring states.

The conflict eventually came to an end after several years as the combatants grew tired of fighting and the United States forcefully stepped in as mediator; under a settlement brokered by Washington in 1998, Kurdish territory was soft-partitioned, with separate governments running rival halves of their nonexistent state—an arrangement that persisted for nearly a decade, until the dueling leaderships slowly came to see the benefits of burying the hatchet and merging most, if not all, of their respective administrations.

What to make of this? For one thing, the Iraqi Kurdistan experience should have been an early warning against any assumption that the removal of dictatorship quickly or inexorably leads to the establishment of peaceful, pluralistic democracy. It also should have exploded the fantasy—still in vogue—that, if only colonial borders could be redrawn along ethnic or sectarian lines, zero-sum politics suddenly recede. In fact, the short-order consequence of Kurdish liberation from the grip of Saddam Hussein—and the creation of a largely homogenous Kurdistan, cleaved from Arab Iraq—was neither stability nor democracy, but a bitter intra-Kurdish fight for domination.

But the story doesn't end there. In fact, over time, a sort of political pluralism *did* develop in Iraqi Kurdistan, along with habits of compromise and toleration among competing

centers of power. As a result, the area today has become a pocket of comparative decency and openness in a Middle East that has very little of these things.

Kurdistan therefore suggests that evolution towards more inclusive, tolerant, and—yes, democratic—politics is achievable, especially when the United States is prepared to be patient, stick it out over the long haul, and wield its influence wisely. Yet the path from absolutism to pluralism is anything but swift or irreversible; it is idiosyncratic, crooked, and protracted.

Unfortunately, these Kurdish lessons would go largely unnoticed by U.S. policymakers as they wrestled with Middle Eastern politics over the next quarter-century. Instead, the prevailing wisdom in Washington has tended to boomerang between periods of giddy exuberance about democratic inevitability in the region, in which success is presumed to lie just around the corner and requires only a gentle nudge in the right direction, and caustic fatalism about democratic impossibility, in which we tell ourselves that nothing we do matters and that the people of this region are destined to fight each other forever. The experience of the Iraqi Kurds reveals that neither of these attitudes is justified or productive.

## **POLITICAL-MILITARY DIVIDE AND THE QUEST FOR NORMALCY**

**T**he Gulf war is remembered for its swift, decisive victory against Saddam Hussein's forces. A mere 100 hours after ground operations began, they were over, the remnants of the once-mighty Iraqi army in retreat along the Highway of Death. This rapid and seemingly unequivocal end to the conflict is invariably held up as a counterpoint to the 2003 march to Baghdad and the "long, hard slog" that ensued.

Yet this narrative of the first Gulf war is thoroughly misleading. Although the Pentagon did achieve conventional battlefield success in Kuwait, the conflict did not, properly speaking, "end" just because we declared it over. Rather, Saddam retreated, regrouped, and soon was back to threatening his neighbors, thwarting weapons inspectors, and chipping away at sanctions. This meant that the U.S. military was compelled not only to stay in the region in force, but to resume kinetic operations against the Iraqis, with no-fly zones and airstrikes—in short, a low-level, open-ended, and deeply unsatisfying conflict.

In all these respects, the true endgame of Desert Storm looks less like the relatively tidy conclusion of World War II, or even Korea or Vietnam, and more like the other messy, post-Cold War peacekeeping, counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism missions that would come after 1991.

In almost every one of these conflicts, the United States has followed a strikingly similar pattern. First, we achieved



our stated military objective faster than anticipated, and at lower cost, but then proved spectacularly ill-prepared for managing the unanticipated consequences. In each case, policymakers reacted to the initial battlefield success by declaring some version of “mission accomplished” and turning attention elsewhere. And by the time Washington began to realize that its military victory had not, in fact, transmuted into a desired political outcome, a critical window of influence and opportunity had been lost.

That is what happened not only with Iraq in the spring of 1991, but again in Iraq in 2003 under George W. Bush and in 2009-2010 under Obama, after the success of the surge in stabilizing the country. A similar story played out with Bush in Afghanistan in 2001, and with Obama in Libya in 2011. Most remarkably—and perhaps alarmingly—these patterns have persisted across presidencies whose fervent foreign policy principle has been repudiation of the predecessor’s approach to the world. This suggests something bigger is going on here. But what?

Part of the explanation is rooted in what Robert Kagan has aptly described as Americans’ desire for (in Warren Harding’s coinage) a “return to normalcy.” Unlike during the early Cold War, when policymakers recognized that open-ended commitments to the key theaters of that contest were going to be essential for our national security, the United States since 1991 has tended to intervene only reluctantly, and in the expectation that, as soon as a discrete objective was achieved, we could quickly downsize if not withdraw entirely. Far from being imperial, America’s long entanglement with Iraq is a story of our constantly looking for an exit strategy so that we could go home—and in doing so, perversely, fostering the conditions that have kept pulling us back in.

Another part of the problem lies in the U.S. tendency to see foreign policy challenges as either purely “political” or “military” in nature, and a U.S. national security bureaucracy that encourages and exacerbates this divide. Situations in which success requires a high degree of civil-military coordination—with the Pentagon and the nonmilitary institutions of our government working closely together, under a common plan—are zones of maximal risk for U.S. foreign policy.

Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, in *The Generals’ War*, explicitly identify this problem. At the root of the Bush administration’s botched transition from conflict to post-conflict, they wrote in 1995, was its “failure to keep political and military objectives in synch.” What’s tragic is that the same criticism could be leveled against U.S. policy in Iraq at almost every other major juncture since these words were published. There are exceptions—most notably, the surge of 2007-2008—but they are few and far between.

Sadly, the latest chapter of U.S. intervention in Iraq

appears to be hewing to the pattern. Like preceding administrations, the Obama administration has set an ambitious military objective—the defeat of the Islamic State—but seems to be doing little if any tangible planning for what will happen the day after the group is driven from Iraqi soil. Nor is there much evidence of institutionalized civil-military unity of effort—for instance, in the form of an integrated civil-military campaign plan. On the contrary, the Pentagon strike mission is being run out of a headquarters in Kuwait, while the U.S. embassy in Baghdad has the lead in managing Iraqi politics, with little apparent systematic coordination between these lines of operation.

In all these respects, the Obama administration—despite having framed so much of its foreign policy as a critique of prior blunders in Iraq—appears to be well on its way to repeating one of the most pernicious of them.

## THE NEXT 25 YEARS

In many ways, the past 25 years have witnessed what can be rightly called the progress of humanity. The failed and catastrophic idea of communism and the brutal empire it justified were peacefully interred. A globalizing economy has enabled hundreds of millions to raise themselves out of the most hopeless poverty. Innovation and generosity have stanchied the suffering and death inflicted by once-unstoppable diseases, while information technology has radically expanded the availability and accessibility of knowledge.

Yet the passage of time does not, by itself, propel us into a better world. And in considering America’s long experience in Iraq, it is difficult to escape the sense that we have learned less during these years than we might have—and less than we should have.

Konrad Adenauer once quipped that the definition of history is “the sum total of things that could have been avoided.” But the task of a leader, in casting his or her gaze backward, is not to derive a sense of superiority from the mistakes of his predecessors, to slough off responsibility for the problems of the present, or to imagine alternative, more pleasing realities that might have come into being. It is to try to understand why and how intelligent, well-intentioned people nonetheless got important things wrong, to discern the patterns and pathologies to which we seem predisposed as individuals and as a polity, and to distill a set of lessons that can help in navigating the present.

Ours is not a political culture, to put it mildly, that is inclined towards this kind of exercise. Yet if America’s protracted entanglement with Iraq suggests anything, it is that the first step in charting the way to a better future must be a more honest and open reckoning with our past. What is equally clear is that, 25 years after Saddam Hussein’s army marched into Kuwait, our understanding of the long, complicated conflict it instigated has only just begun. ♦

# Consistently Wrong

*The president's happy talk and sad results*

BY MAX BOOT

President Obama is putting on the hard sell to market the nuclear deal he reached with Iran. On July 14, in announcing the agreement, he said: “This deal shows the real and meaningful change that American leadership and diplomacy can bring—change that makes our country and the world safer and more secure. We negotiated from a position of strength and principle—and the result is a nuclear deal that cuts off every pathway to a nuclear weapon.”

He promised that this agreement would put Iran and the entire region on a path away from “violence and rigid ideology,” a path towards “tolerance and peaceful resolution of conflicts,” a path that “leads to more integration into the global economy, more engagement with the international community, and the ability of the Iranian people to prosper and thrive.” In conclusion, he said, “This deal offers an opportunity to move in a new direction. We should seize it.”

Stirring words. But are they credible? Aside from the specifics of the Iran deal, it is possible to look back on the president’s litany of pronouncements about the Middle East to assess the reliability of his promises. Here are a few highlights.

## LIBYA

In 2011, President Obama joined an international coalition of countries to drive Muammar Qaddafi out of power. On August 22, after Qaddafi’s ouster, he said: “A season of conflict must lead to one of peace. The future of Libya is now in the hands of the Libyan people. Going forward, the United States will continue to stay in close coordination with the TNC [Transitional National Council]. We will continue to insist that the basic rights of the Libyan people are respected. And we will continue to work with our allies and partners in the international community to protect the people of Libya, and to support a peaceful transition to democracy.”

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A year later, on July 7, 2012, he said, “The United States is proud of the role that we played in supporting the Libyan revolution and protecting the Libyan people, and we look forward to working closely with the new Libya—including the elected Congress and Libya’s new leaders. We will engage as partners as the Libyan people work to build open and transparent institutions, establish security and the rule of law, advance opportunity, and promote unity and national reconciliation.”

In fact the United States did precious little to bolster the legitimacy of Libya’s nascent democratic regime. Partly as a result of that failure, Libya transitioned not to democracy but to anarchy—anarchy in which U.S. ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans were killed. Now Libya has, in effect, no government, and the country is divided among warring militias, with the Islamic State playing an increasingly prominent role.

## IRAQ

In 2011, President Obama made a halfhearted effort to win renewal of the Status of Forces Agreement allowing U.S. troops to remain in Iraq. When negotiations, which had begun in the middle of the year, bogged down, the president, rather than getting personally involved in the talks, instead announced that all U.S. troops were coming home. But don’t worry, he said. Their departure would not imperil Iraq’s future.

On October 21, 2011, he promised: “With our diplomats and civilian advisers in the lead, we’ll help Iraqis strengthen institutions that are just, representative, and accountable. We’ll build new ties of trade and of commerce, culture, and education, that unleash the potential of the Iraqi people. We’ll partner with an Iraq that contributes to regional security and peace, just as we insist that other nations respect Iraq’s sovereignty. . . . Just as Iraqis have persevered through war, I’m confident that they can build a future worthy of their history as a cradle of civilization. . . . So to sum up, the United States is moving forward from a position of strength.”

A few weeks later, on December 12, 2011, he hosted Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki at the White House. In a joint appearance, Obama said: “The prime minister leads Iraq’s most inclusive government yet. Iraqis are working to build

institutions that are efficient and independent and transparent. . . . In the coming years, it's estimated that Iraq's economy will grow even faster than China's or India's. . . . People throughout the region will see a new Iraq that's determining its own destiny—a country in which people from different religious sects and ethnicities can resolve their differences peacefully through the democratic process.”

We now know Iraq's economy has *not* been growing faster than China's or India's, its polity has not become known for inclusiveness, and no one in the Middle East or anywhere else looks to Iraq as a model of how people can peacefully resolve their differences. Instead, as soon as U.S. forces left, Maliki began victimizing the Sunni minority and undermining the professionalism of the Iraqi security forces by removing the most competent officers and replacing them with political hacks. This left the Sunnis feeling aggrieved. Many of them welcomed the Islamic State as a liberator from Shiite oppression, and when ISIS launched a major offensive in Iraq, the army fell apart.

Iraq is now in the throes of a full-blown civil war in which ISIS and the Iranian-backed Shiite militias are dividing the country between them. Maliki was ousted from office with Washington's help, but his replacement is unable to exercise much power in a country where ultimate authority is now wielded by Gen. Qassem Suleimani of the Iranian Quds Force.

## SYRIA

In 2011, an uprising started against the brutal rule of Bashar al-Assad. On April 22 of that year, Obama proclaimed, “We strongly oppose the Syrian government's treatment of its citizens, and we continue to oppose its continued destabilizing behavior more generally, including support for terrorism and terrorist groups. The United States will continue to stand up for democracy and the universal rights that all human beings deserve, in Syria and around the world.”

A few months later, on August 18, Obama went further. He said: “The future of Syria must be determined

by its people, but President Bashar al-Assad is standing in their way. His calls for dialogue and reform have rung hollow while he is imprisoning, torturing, and slaughtering his own people. We have consistently said that President Assad must lead a democratic transition or get out of the way. He has not led. For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside.”

The United States, he continued, “cannot and will not impose this transition upon Syria,” but “what the United States will support is an effort to bring about a Syria that is democratic, just, and inclusive for all Syrians. We will support this outcome by pressuring President Assad to get out of the way of this transition, and standing up for the universal rights of the Syrian people along with others in the international community.”

On February 4, 2012, he reiterated this call, declaring, “Assad must halt his campaign of killing and crimes against his own people now. He must step aside and allow a democratic transition to proceed immediately.”

On August 31, 2013, he condemned Assad's use of chemical weapons, which, he said, “is an assault on human dignity. It also presents a serious danger to our national security. It risks making a mockery of the global prohibition on the use of chemical weapons. It endangers our friends and our partners along Syria's borders, including Israel,

Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, and Iraq. It could lead to escalating use of chemical weapons, or their proliferation to terrorist groups who would do our people harm. In a world with many dangers, this menace must be confronted.”

That last statement was widely believed to signal that the United States was about to unleash air attacks on Assad's regime. Instead, in a remarkable *volte-face*, Obama agreed to a Russian-brokered deal under which Assad promised to turn over all his chemical weapons for destruction. On May 14, 2015, Obama boasted of success: “We positioned ourselves to be willing to take military action,” he said. “The reason we did not was because Assad gave up his chemical weapons. That's not speculation on our part. That, in fact, has been confirmed by the organization internationally that is charged with eliminating chemical weapons.”





The agreement did result in the removal of most of Assad's chemical weapons—but not all. Assad continues to drop chlorine bombs on his populace along with even more destructive conventional ordnance. On July 23, 2015, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that “U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded that the regime didn't give up all of the chemical weapons it was supposed to.”

In the meantime, there has been precious little standing up for “democracy” and “human rights”—so little, in fact, that during the past year the Department of Defense has trained just 60 fighters from the Free Syrian Army. There is no sign that the United States is doing anything to create a Syria that is “democratic, just, and inclusive.” Instead, Obama has shifted from calling for Assad's removal to acquiescing in his continuance in power, while concluding a deal with Iran that all but ensures an enlargement of the substantial subsidy that Tehran pays to underwrite this brutal regime.

### AL QAEDA/ISIS

Ever since the death of Osama bin Laden, Obama has been boasting that al Qaeda, often specifying “core al Qaeda,” is “on the path to defeat.” On January 24, 2012, for example, he said in the State of the Union address: “Ending the Iraq war has allowed us to strike decisive blows against our enemies. From Pakistan to Yemen, the al Qaeda operatives who remain are scrambling, knowing that they can't escape the reach of the United States of America.” In fact, while “core al Qaeda” in Pakistan has been relatively quiet, the organization's affiliates and fellow travelers are blossoming in Yemen (Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), Syria (the Nusra Front), Libya (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb), and Somalia (Al Shabab), among other countries, rendering his boasts hollow.

And thanks in no small part to Obama's failure to keep troops in Iraq and to intervene more actively when the Syrian civil war broke out, a vacuum of power developed in Iraq and Syria that was soon filled by a fearsome new terrorist group—the Islamic State. On January 7, 2014, in an interview with David Remnick of the *New Yorker* just days after the fall of Fallujah, Obama dismissed the threat: “The analogy we use around here sometimes, and I think is accurate, is if a jayvee team puts on Lakers uniforms that doesn't make them Kobe Bryant.” In short, ISIS was no al Qaeda.

As it turned out, the “junior varsity team” soon controlled far more territory than al Qaeda ever had—stretching from Raqqa in Syria to Mosul and Ramadi in Iraq. ISIS has withstood more than a year of American bombing while expanding its domain. Recently the violent Islamist group Boko Haram in Nigeria and Cameroon changed its name to the Islamic State West Africa. And FBI director

James Comey now acknowledges the obvious, namely that ISIS poses a bigger threat to the American homeland than al Qaeda did.

### ARAB SPRING

Obama welcomed the Arab Spring—the revolutions that swept the Middle East in 2011-2012. On May 19, 2011, he said, “For six months, we have witnessed an extraordinary change taking place in the Middle East and North Africa. Square by square, town by town, country by country, the people have risen up to demand their basic human rights. . . . The events of the past six months show us that strategies of repression and strategies of diversion will not work anymore. Satellite television and the Internet provide a window into the wider world—a world of astonishing progress in places like India and Indonesia and Brazil. Cell phones and social networks allow young people to connect and organize like never before. And so a new generation has emerged. And their voices tell us that change cannot be denied. . . . Through the moral force of nonviolence, the people of the region have achieved more change in six months than terrorists have accomplished in decades.”

It is true that the Arab Spring did portend a major change—but hardly a shift toward freedom and away from terrorism. Instead the Arab Spring led to bloody civil wars in Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq that are still going on. In Egypt the “Arab Spring” led to the overthrow of a military regime, its replacement by a Muslim Brotherhood regime that after winning an election began to squelch dissent, and its overthrow by the same military that had been ousted from power temporarily. In only one country—Tunisia—did the Arab Spring actually produce the kind of change that Obama envisioned, and there are now widespread fears that an elected government made up of old regime loyalists may be starting to roll back that country's hard-won freedom, in part to combat a wave of Islamist terrorism that has been exacerbated by the chaos in next-door Libya.

Let us stipulate that no one ever gets it entirely right in analyzing a region as complex as the Middle East, and all presidents try to accentuate the positive in selling their policies. But Obama is more wrong than most. He has compiled a breathtakingly consistent record of pursuing policies that he claimed would produce terrific results, including the creation of democracy in Iraq and Libya and Syria and elsewhere, but that instead resulted in more violence and chaos.

It is worth keeping all of this in mind when assessing Obama's airy assurances about Iran and the wonderful future he foresees for the Middle East after the implementation of his nuclear deal. The president may be right that things will work out as well as he envisions, but if so, that will be a first. ♦



'Lincoln Writing the Proclamation of Freedom' (1863) by David Gilmour Blythe

# Emancipation Strategy

*The ushering-out of the Peculiar Institution.* BY RICHARD STRINER

**L**eonard L. Richards, professor emeritus of history at the University of Massachusetts (Amherst), has given us a compelling and multifaceted account of how the antislavery movement achieved its definitive triumph in the form of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution.

Like any historical account, *Who*

*Richard Striner, professor of history at Washington College, is the author, most recently, of How America Can Spend Its Way Back to Greatness: A Guide to Monetary Reform.*

## Who Freed the Slaves?

*The Fight Over the Thirteenth Amendment*  
by Leonard L. Richards  
Chicago, 320 pp., \$30

*Freed the Slaves?* presents interpretations that examine certain points of view at the expense of others. This is, of course, a problem inherent in historical studies. But to his credit, Richards has produced a very rich account—a veritable gold mine of information—that consists of many overlapping stories: stories of how the overall strategies of different

kinds of slavery opponents developed; stories of how different individuals, groups, and key episodes played out as the violent struggle over slavery in America unfolded.

Spectacular transformations accompanied the struggle: Some advocates of slavery found themselves performing a gradual (or sudden) about-face as they came to loathe the institution—or else oppose it for opportunistic reasons of their own—and some white supremacists discovered that their bigotry was ill-grounded. Alliances shifted and broke apart, erstwhile enemies became the unlikeliest of allies, and so forth.

Impressions of a great many admirable, hideous, and ambiguous personalities leap from these pages: John J. Crittenden, the stubborn proslavery senator from Kentucky; the quirky political general Benjamin Butler; Frederick Douglass, the fearless black abolitionist; Lorenzo Thomas, a brigadier general given plenipotentiary powers to recruit black troops and who threatened to throw out of the Army any racist officers who opposed him; the cantankerous and deeply racist Blair family of Maryland and Missouri, who were opposed to the spread of slavery; August Belmont, the proslavery financier, Manhattan socialite, and Democratic party leader; key Radical Republicans; members of the Lincoln cabinet; and Abraham Lincoln himself.

Most of all, however, Richards chose to weave his account around Representative James Ashley of Ohio, the Radical Republican who played the foremost role in pushing the 13th Amendment through Congress. (Anyone who saw Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln* a few years ago may remember its portrayal of Ashley.) And one of the points that emerges here with particular force is the Herculean effort ridding America of slavery required and the knife-edge contingency upon which the outcome hovered during most of the Civil War.

From the Founding Fathers onward, the eminently moderate and arguably sensible idea of phasing out slavery by compensating the slave-owners—the method that the British used successfully during the 1830s to banish slavery from the West Indies—was opposed with fanatical intensity by many, if not most, American slave-owners. Let the economic determinists take note of this case study: Slavery was not fundamentally, or at least not exclusively or principally, a matter of money and wealth. The most virulent defenders of slavery could not be bought off by anyone: They could not even be paid to do the right thing.

There were other forces, beyond economics, at work: Slavery provided a ready outlet for power-lust, domination, and, of course, the near-universal lunacy (prevalent in both North and

South) of race ideology, built upon the notion that the outward physical features of our fellow human beings are indicators of inward character traits, either good or bad. But it was the Civil War itself—a war caused by the slavery dispute, as the proclamations of secession by South Carolina, Mississippi, and other slave states make clear—that provided the horrific, but nonetheless priceless, leverage that was needed to rid the United States of slavery.

After preparatory chapters that set the stage by examining micro-politics in several distinctive arenas, Richards brings it all together by



*Rep. James Ashley (R-Ohio)*

showing how James Ashley gathered the swing votes necessary to push the 13th Amendment through the House of Representatives. His fundamental strategy was to target Northern and border-state Democrats who were lame ducks and thus largely immune to the threat of political retaliation for breaking with their own party's overwhelmingly racist orthodoxy.

Yet there was more: In order to sweeten the whole proposition, Ashley worked with Lincoln to offer these swing-vote Democrats "incentives." Yes, some Democrats who swung the right way got rewarded, and Richards concludes that—as rumor had it at

the time, and as the Spielberg version portrayed so memorably—Lincoln was deeply complicit in the dealmaking that killed off slavery once and for all. Richards correctly observes that there is no "smoking-gun" evidence to show exactly what Lincoln did. But he concludes that the reason for this is that Lincoln made certain to leave no written traces whatsoever:

Although there is no proof "beyond a shadow of a doubt" that Lincoln himself made deals, there is ample reason to believe that he allowed others to do it for him and, also, that he promised to fulfill whatever bargains they made. Nearly every man in Congress had a story to tell.

Richards is certain that Lincoln authorized Ashley to make such deals. But this leads to a major problem in Richards's account: Except for the dealmaking—along with the abundant evidence that Lincoln was fervently in favor of the amendment and pushed it through Congress as quickly as possible after his 1864 reelection—Lincoln comes off here as something of a dithering fuddy-duddy, a temporizer who skulked in the shadows and sided with the most retrograde members of the Republican party when it came to the slavery issue.

It is not at all unusual, in this day and age, for accounts of the antislavery crusade to make the abolitionists and Radical Republicans the foremost heroes, relegating Lincoln to secondary status. This is, to some extent, understandable: In any campaign to propel great historical change, the fiery activists who occupy the vanguard of the movement play a necessary and decisive role. Without them, the movement would lack the requisite dynamic force, and it would never gather momentum. But such people, by themselves, are often incapable of summoning all of the diverse forms of power needed to achieve ultimate victory. Even Ashley, in the end, had to focus his thoughts on the grubby and practical politics of making deals with unsavory characters.

One can make the case that, throughout the Civil War, Lincoln



played an indispensable role in coordinating, with exquisite calibration, the force that the antislavery movement required. And that he did so through extraordinary coalition-building and by balancing his fiery antislavery convictions—convictions that come through with overwhelming power if one reads his pre-presidential speeches and letters from the 1850s—with worst-case contingency planning.

So many of Lincoln's actions that come off as timid or cowardly in Richards's account must be understood in

light of one simple, terrible fact: The whole effort might have failed if any one of a number of variables had gone wrong for the Civil War Republicans. If the Confederates had achieved final victory on the battlefield, or if Lincoln had been thrown out of office and replaced by a proslavery Democrat, the antislavery movement might have suffered a catastrophic defeat from which it might never have recovered. Without Lincoln's virtuosity, though, all the efforts of James Ashley and his outspoken friends might have been in vain. ♦



# Defender of Fidel

*No dictator is a hero to his bodyguard.*

BY RONALD RADOSH

Juan Reinaldo Sánchez was drafted into the Cuban Army in 1967 and assigned to the Department of Personal Security, the branch dedicated to protecting Fidel Castro. Starting at the lowest rung, where he was assigned to the blocks where Cuba's top revolutionary leaders worked, Sánchez quickly rose through the ranks because of his good performance and revolutionary attitude. As a result, he was selected to join an elite group, made up of two divisions of 1,500 handpicked troops, who protected Fidel Castro 24 hours a day. Sánchez certainly stood out: In 1976, he graduated from a new training school for elite security agents where he earned a black belt in karate and became Cuba's top sniper and best pistol shooter, a status gained from national military competitions.

Eventually chosen to be Castro's main security guard, Sánchez accompanied Castro everywhere he went, including trips to the Soviet Union,

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## The Double Life of Fidel Castro

*My 17 Years as Personal Bodyguard to El Líder Máximo*

by Juan Reinaldo Sánchez

with Axel Gylén

St. Martin's, 278 pp., \$25.99

Central and South America, and Western European capitals. As such, he was in the unique position to observe Castro and his actual lifestyle, one 180 degrees from the "socialist" values he preached and supposedly lived. In fact, according to Sánchez, Castro lives like a typical Latin American *caudillo*: He "transformed and enlarged his father's [large plantation] property to make Cuba into a single hacienda of eleven million people" in which, as lord and master, he would control the lives of his subjects, virtually the entire Cuban population of poor peasants and urban dwellers.

Fidel Castro has often told Cubans and the world press that he is an exemplary revolutionary leader who works day and night for the revolution and lives as simply as the poorest Cuban, taking only a meager official salary

of \$38 per month (in American dollars). Sánchez finds this myth "highly comic," since, in reality, Castro was the CEO of what might be called Cuba Holdings, an entity with sums in the millions, all of it available for Castro's personal use at a moment's whim.

Sánchez details how Castro uses this wealth for his personal comfort, a state secret carefully hidden from the people he led until his recent official retirement. For the first time, Sánchez exposes the secret properties Castro owns, giving exact locations, using maps and Google satellite imagery. The leader who preaches the need to sacrifice for the revolution has, in addition to 20 homes throughout the island, a private island called Cayo Piedra, where he and his entourage would go each weekend in June and for the entire month of August. It was, writes Sánchez, a "millionaire's paradise" where Castro kept his private yacht, *Aguarama II*, and had his own ecological underwater sanctuary.

Despite Castro having an official photographer, Sánchez notes that no photos were ever allowed to be taken of his vacation paradise. Few, except his immediate family—his wife Dalia and their five children—were allowed to go there. There were a few exceptions, including the explorer Jacques Cousteau; news people such as Barbara Walters of ABC and Ted Turner, whose favorable coverage on CNN Castro appreciated; and Erich Honecker, the leader of East Germany to whom Castro was indebted for his Stasi-trained state security agents.

Among Castro's other indulgent privileges was his insistence that, whenever he traveled abroad, he had to sleep in his favorite bed from his main Havana residence. Every time he traveled, his aides had the bed taken apart and shipped to Castro's destination, where it would be put together in his hotel or lodging and ready for use before his arrival. The former guerrilla leader, evidently, was making up for the time he spent sleeping outdoors on the Sierra Maestra, fighting the Batista regime.

Sánchez goes after other stories surrounding the revolution's history. He

contests the myth that, in the 1980s, during the Reagan presidency, “indigenous” revolutions broke out in Central America. Sánchez argues that they were exports by Fidel Castro of his revolution. He reveals the existence of a secret training camp 15 miles east of Havana, where the government trained and directed foreign guerrilla operations all over the world. Recruits came from Venezuela, Colombia, Chile, and Nicaragua, and included Basque separatists, members of the Irish Republican Army, and, of course, soldiers from Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. It was here that Carlos the Jackal, Daniel and Humberto Ortega, and Abimael Guzman, leader of Peru’s violent Shining Path, were all trained.

During the Allende years in Chile, Sánchez writes, Castro preferred (and trained) the leaders of Chile’s far revolutionary left, who thought Salvador Allende was too moderate. Castro was preparing for a deepening of the Chilean revolution at a time when his own Cuban-trained forces would overthrow Allende. We learn that Castro used Allende’s daughter to persuade her father to fire his own Chilean Army guards and replace them with left-wing revolutionaries under Cuban control.

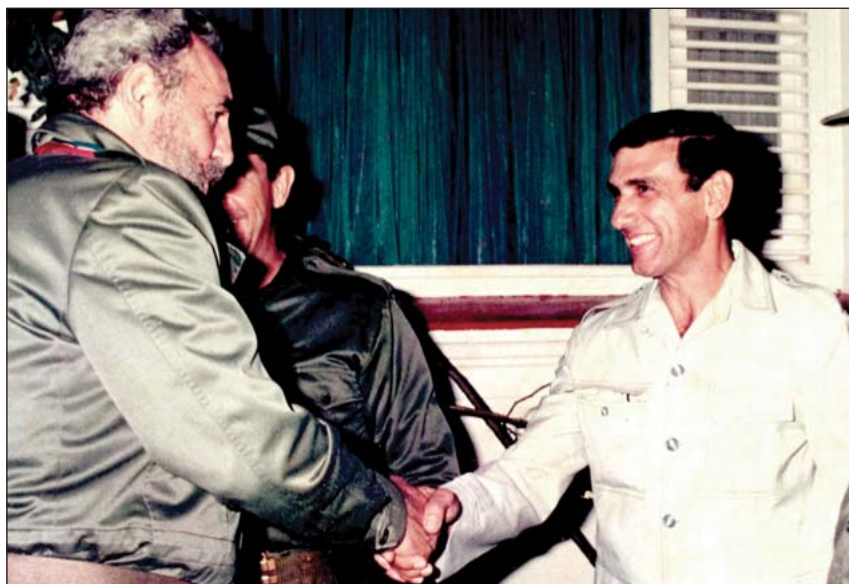
Most important, Sánchez offers details that confirm allegations made by the Reagan administration regarding the Nicaraguan revolution. Calling it “Fidel’s Other Revolution,” Sánchez reveals how, in secret meetings with the Sandinistas, Castro organized unity among the various fighting factions. He notes that “Fidel’s involvement was crucial in the Nicaraguan revolution”; Castro considered Nicaragua his first real success in exporting the Cuban revolution. Sánchez personally witnessed how Castro smuggled arms to the Nicaraguans, and to El Salvador’s FMLN, during the latter’s attempt to overthrow the centrist Duarte government.

Finally, Sánchez learned something that led him to question everything he had believed in. Having faithfully served Fidel Castro for almost two decades, he overheard a meeting between Castro and his minister of the

interior, who spoke about the details of smuggling hard drugs to the United States by way of Colombian drug lords. “In a few seconds,” Sánchez writes, “my whole world and all my ideals had come crashing down.” Never, he thought, would Cuba’s revered leader be organizing cocaine trafficking from the island, “directing illegal operations like a real godfather.”

Indeed, when the effort became too big to hide, Castro did the only thing possible: He accused army commander Arnaldo Ochoa, the most revered Cuban leader who had returned from leading Cuban troops in Angola and received

the Cuban people. He observes that Cuban workers, even people laboring in new tourist hotels, are given but a fraction of the salaries they’ve earned. The hotels in which they are employed are owned by the government or armed forces, after investments by French, Spanish, and Italian business interests, who pay Western salaries not to their employees but to the Cuban state. They have “invoiced this labor at a high price (and in cash) before transferring a tiny proportion to the workers concerned in virtually valueless Cuban pesos,” Sánchez writes, who considers this arrange-



*Fidel Castro, Juan Reinaldo Sánchez (ca. 1980)*

the government’s highest award, of tainting the revolution by engaging in drug smuggling for personal profit—an operation Castro had ordered him to undertake. General Ochoa was soon put to death after a Soviet-style purge trial.

The revelations here are important for Americans to read, just as President Obama has restored full diplomatic relations with Cuba, with the opening of an embassy in each country. Many believe that this step, along with the restoration of American tourism, will lead to a relaxation of the dictatorship in Cuba as Western values (and dollars) begin to transform the country.

But Sánchez provides considerable evidence to suggest that new Western investment is unlikely to assist

ment to be a “modern variant on slavery,” reminiscent of “the relationship of dependence that existed in the nineteenth-century plantations toward the all-powerful master.”

Two years away from retirement age, and growing more disillusioned by the day, Juan Reinaldo Sánchez made a formal request to retire early. Immediately, he was arrested by Castro and spent two years in harsh prison conditions. He was released in 1996, 40 pounds lighter than he had weighed upon entry. After a dozen attempts to escape Cuba, he succeeded in 2008. Hoping to devote the last chapter of his life to working for freedom in Cuba, he died just as this American edition of his book was published. ♦

# Fear Itself

*The art of sharing the stage with dread.*

BY JOHN CHECK



*Vladimir Horowitz at Carnegie Hall (1965)*

Vladimir Horowitz and Maria Callas, Ella Fitzgerald and Laurence Olivier, Sarah Bernhardt and Luciano Pavarotti—these transcendent performers communicated a point of view, an inexpressible feel for life. And they did so despite their spells of stage fright.

Calling stage fright “an act of mutiny by the mind against the body,” Sara Solovitch explores the condition, both as she has known it as a performer and as she has come to understand it as a writer. *Playing Scared* begins by relating her often dread-filled experiences as a young pianist in recitals and competitions. Onstage she would feel her hands turn clammy, her body tense up. One missed note would lead to another, leading inevitably to more. Mistakes of this

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## Playing Scared

*A History and Memoir of Stage Fright*  
by Sara Solovitch  
Bloomsbury, 288 pp., \$26

sort would induce a memory slip, and entire swaths of music that had been under her fingers would simply disappear. Desperately, she would jump from one passage to another, making a hash of the compositional logic of the piece she was playing.

She abandoned the piano upon entering college, but she returned to it 30 years later only to find herself in the same position. Practicing went just so far, and lessons were of little help: Her nerves were as frayed as ever. She decided she must finally get the better of them. To that end, she sought new teachers, pursued different therapies, and devoted a year to studying what she terms this “great leveler.” Her goal

was to perform again in public—at last without embarrassment.

As she learned about stage fright and the related topic of performance anxiety, she discovered how variously people have tried to cope with its symptoms. The masterful Horowitz, for example, followed a routine without deviation before each recital. Some performers turn to drugs, very often beta-blockers, which were originally developed in the early 1960s to treat heart disease. (I was surprised by the claim that 30 percent of orchestral musicians rely on them.) Others turn to meditation, yoga, or psychotherapy.

One of the strengths of this book is the clarity and confidence of Solovitch’s prose. Here is the opening of her chapter about the amygdala, a part of the brain central to the processing of emotions:

Fear: It begins with urgent motor impulses from the brain to the adrenal glands, which respond by dumping adrenaline into the bloodstream and putting the body on alert. The heart beats harder and faster. Breathing grows rapid to increase oxygen levels. Eyes dilate to bring more light to the retina, heightening visual acuity. Blood flow is redirected from hands and feet to the large muscles in the upper torso, arms, and legs.

Solovitch’s goal of performing again in public gives the book its plot. She commits to a date for a recital a year in the distance. Chapters later, two months remain. Then there are 10 days; then there are fewer. Time markers of this sort intensify the plot, endowing it with a dramatic accelerando.

Throughout are accounts of people who have known, directly or indirectly, the fear of performance. One is a psychotherapist and competitive equestrian who, in her 20s, worked as a network television writer and producer. Another is a onetime trumpeter with the National Symphony—a “serial careerist,” as Solovitch describes him—who, upon quitting music, took up engineering before giving that up to become a psychologist.

There is a short profile of Tom Durkin, a racetrack announcer for NBC who, at length, found himself



unequal to the pressure of performing for an audience of 20 million. There is a longer profile of Denny Zeitlin, a clinical professor of psychiatry whose musical credits include composing for *Sesame Street* and playing at the Newport Jazz Festival, and a still longer one of baseball player Steve Sax, bedeviled early in his career by a case of the “yips,” the confounding inability to make a routine throw from second base to first. (Too bad Solovitch didn’t mention Rick Ankiel, the once-promising pitcher who heroically refashioned himself as an outfielder after losing his ability to find the plate.) These biographical sketches, in which she often quotes the subjects at length, easily make for the most absorbing reading here.

Regrettably, Solovitch’s own story is compromised by an unsatisfying subplot about her mother. Featured prominently in the first chapter, she is portrayed as a sour stage mother, attentive and critical in her listening and sparing in her praise. It is at her behest that Solovitch enters piano competitions while in her childhood and adolescence. It is she who hectors Solovitch to practice, urges on her study in the preparatory program of the Eastman School of Music, and contrives for her the opportunity of attending Eastman for college. The daughter balks, declaring her intention to become a writer. Little is revealed of how this news was greeted, even less of the nature of their relationship once the author reached adulthood.

What is plain is that, by bringing these old memories back to life and placing them at the beginning of this book, Solovitch appears vindictive. This is a significant off-note because, by the end, her mother becomes sympathetic in a way we hadn’t been led to expect.

*Playing Scared* rests on the implication that behind many performances is a hidden history of fallible men and women grappling with their nerves and anxieties: What we see onstage is but a small part of a larger, more complicated picture. If so, how remarkable it is that the best performers, when it comes to the crunch, enable us to forget this. ♦

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON

BCA

# Poet in Embryo

*Old Possum’s formative years.*

BY JAMES MATTHEW WILSON

Some years ago, while visiting T.S. Eliot’s native St. Louis, I took in a lecture on Eliot’s poem “Marina,” delivered by the Scottish poet and critic Robert Crawford. Most people will grant that T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) is a difficult poet, but after 20 years of reading him, I find that “Marina” is the only one of his poems I continue to find obscure, even opaque. Crawford interpreted the poem astutely, but what most impressed me was his willingness to set aside certainty of sense in favor of an exceptional richness of sound:

*What seas what shores what grey rocks  
and what islands  
What water lapping the bow  
And scent of pine and the woodthrush  
singing through the fog  
What images return  
O my daughter*

Crawford heard the “soundscape” of Eliot’s poem well. If this is an essential virtue in a biographer of most poets, it is all the more important in Eliot’s case. His intellectual achievement and compass of knowledge was so vast that it will always be a temptation for the scholar to wander away from the poems and get lost in the subtleties of Eliot’s brilliant absorption of everything from the history of ancient occidental and oriental philosophy to the financial state of Germany in the wake of the Versailles treaty. Eliot’s biographer, therefore, not only has to be able to speak competently on such matters, but also has to keep before us the individual words and verses as *sounds* that made Eliot,

*James Matthew Wilson, associate professor of religion and literature at Villanova, is the author, most recently, of Some Permanent Things.*

## Young Eliot

*From St. Louis to The Waste Land*  
by Robert Crawford  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 512 pp., \$35



T.S. Eliot (1920)

among other things, the most influential poet of the last century.

Crawford succeeds at this task, in three ways. Beginning with his thorough account of Eliot’s childhood in St. Louis, Crawford attends to the ways in which the life and culture of that city—including the sounds and songs Eliot probably heard—lingered in the poet’s mind, as if he were silently kneading them for years, before finding expression in this or that brief phrase in the poems. Without derailing a well-told story, Crawford records the uncanny echoes of words from Eliot’s life in his poems.

Second, Crawford is the first Eliot biographer given permission to quote freely from the available archives of Eliot's literary remains. Every other biographer and scholar of the poet has been hindered, for decades, by the protective restrictions of the Eliot estate. Crawford reprints Eliot's own words—not just his poems, but his letters, school papers, and essays—extensively. On every page, it seems, the biographer defers to the voice of the poet.

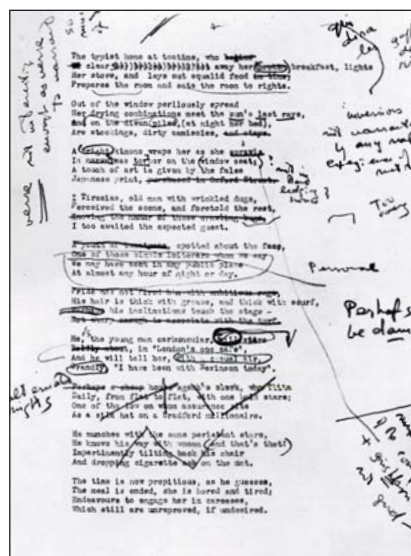
Third, and finally, these qualities fuse to give the biography of a poet just the dramatic form it demands. Those who have endured the "Oxen of the Sun" episode in James Joyce's *Ulysses* will recall that Joyce traces the developments of English style out of (as it were) a primordial soup of sounds through the various refinements of its masters across the centuries. Crawford gives us something similar—though it makes for more amiable reading. The sounds of the St. Louis street and stage, the books and songs of nursery, school, and college are carefully noted by Crawford in the order they must first have touched Eliot's ear.

As Eliot grows, we see these formless sounds beginning to take shape in his juvenilia and academic assignments, and then in the brilliant early critical essays and poems he began publishing after settling in England at the outbreak of World War I. Crawford traces Eliot's footsteps through London, conjuring up the interior of the Church of St. Magnus the Martyr and the voices and music of lunching workmen—details that will find their place in those mosaics of echoes, quotations, and allusions that are Eliot's poems. All this culminates in a series of chapters that trace Eliot's life as it seems to trudge through nervous exhaustion, a failing marriage, his work at Lloyd's Bank, and literary rivalries toward the publication of his epoch-making poem, *The Waste Land*, in 1922.

Crawford thus demonstrates a claim Eliot frequently made in his critical essays: The true form of a poet's life is defined by the poems themselves. Other biographers have sought to convey Eliot's spirit; Crawford is not

always so successful at that, but he supersedes them simply by giving us the shape of the life as sound, as one lived for the sake of the work.

The tale of Eliot's life is one of a well-heeled, cerebral, and clever—but otherwise typical—scion of the New England aristocracy. A brilliant but unambitious student, Eliot left it to his mother to smooth the way for him from Smith Academy in St. Louis to Milton Academy and Harvard. Deeply shy, Eliot nonetheless fit into the elite milieu of Harvard very well; like most of his fellow undergraduates, he seems to have treated college as an occasion for polite society and leisure more



Manuscript of "The Waste Land"

than for study. He listened more than he spoke or wrote—and was nearly expelled in consequence.

How this undergraduate nonchalance metamorphosed into almost pedantic intellectualism abroad, during a year in Paris, and made Eliot a doctoral student who impressed nearly all his Harvard professors, including the visiting Bertrand Russell, Crawford does not really explain. But he documents it more richly than any previous biographer so that one comes away with a vivid picture of Eliot's world, even as the young man remains almost as elusive to us as he must have been to his friends and his first love, the student and actress Emily Hale.

Too timid to discover whether Hale

returned his affections, Eliot fled. He wrote his Harvard dissertation during a year at Oxford, just after the outbreak of the war, and several times considered returning to America to defend it and assume a place on Harvard's faculty. But the handful of short poems he had written seem to have meant more to him than all his studies and prospects. So, as is well-known, he married the unbalanced Vivienne Haigh-Wood and attempted to make a career in London, first as a teacher and then as a banker.

The English literati sensed brilliance behind his cold demeanor. Virginia Woolf feared him. His fellow American poet Ezra Pound envied, admired, and promoted him. Russell respected him, though not enough to let it stand in the way of his bedding Vivienne. By 1919, Eliot could write to his mother that there was "a small and select public . . . which regards me as the best living critic, as well as the best living poet, in England."

Pound made finding patronage for Eliot a *cause célèbre*. Lady Rothermere made Eliot an editor by financing his influential magazine, *The Criterion*. Publishers, both American and English, paid richly for Eliot's prose hackwork and slow trickle of poems. Vivienne proved fiercely loyal to her husband's genius, though her mental illness strained it and her infidelity and flirtations must have wounded it. Through all this, Eliot wrote a roughly 1,000-line poem; Vivienne and Pound helped him cut it to 433.

With European intellectuals viewing the recent war as a civilizational collapse, Eliot published his great poem, whose "mythical method" would show that beneath the wasteland of the present remains, always, history's cyclical drama of death and rebirth. Every catastrophe prepares the earth for a resurrection whose precise character cannot be anticipated. *The Waste Land* would be, at once, the vindication of Eliot's first three decades of life, a postmortem on a "botched civilization" (Pound's phrase), and a prayer of hope that something good might be born into the world again.

That good—found in Eliot’s conversion to Christianity in 1927, his renewed friendship with Emily Hale, and his second, much happier, marriage in old age to Valerie Fletcher—will be the subject of Crawford’s second volume. There, the biographer promises, we shall find a revolution in our knowledge of Eliot’s life, because he will be allowed to study and quote what no one else has: the long correspondence between Eliot and Hale. This volume springs no such surprises, but it succeeds in offering abundant access to Eliot’s words and a remarkable comprehensiveness regarding Eliot’s world.

Eliot’s reputation has been battered by fads in literary scholarship since his death. He was sometimes called a fascist during his life; later scholars would make a dogma of it. He has been accused of antisemitism and homosexuality. The basis of such claims has sometimes been slim, even nonexistent, but, in brief, Eliot’s reputation has been kept alive mostly by demonizing the man himself.

Crawford’s one serious miscue here is his being too attuned to all this: He frequently lingers on questions of “gender” and Eliot’s view of Jews, as if looking over his shoulder at the assertions of scholars rather than keeping his eye trained on the details of the poet’s life. This gives *Young Eliot*, at times, the feel of a monograph of passing interest rather than an effort to present the finished, polished story of Eliot’s life. A few slips into jargon and the occasional direct references to the work of other scholars, which should have been reserved for the endnotes, contribute to this feeling.

No biography, of course, can declare itself the final version of a life story, but every biographer ought to try to fashion his account for permanence. Perhaps because Crawford was the first biographer to have permission to let Eliot speak freely, he felt less ownership of his own words. Even so, he has written a book of great value for anyone who would know the alternately typical and great man behind that great poem, *The Waste Land*. ♦

B&A

# An Adriatic Dream

*Metaphorical drama for the 20th century.*

BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

**D**aša Drndić, a Croatian, has gained respect in her country as a novelist, literary critic, and playwright.

After teaching in Canada and completing a master’s degree in communications in the United States, thanks to a Fulbright grant, she now teaches philosophy at the University of Rijeka.

With *Trieste*, a novel in the “neo-Borgesian” style—merging history, personal anecdotes, and fictional meditations—Drndić has written a great work, adding significantly to our knowledge of the Holocaust in German-occupied Europe. Centering her narrative in Trieste, the port at the north of the Adriatic Sea, she has produced a harrowing volume. *Trieste* is not for the faint-hearted, but it is a necessary and virtuous chronicle.

Trieste was a Habsburg seaport for centuries, inhabited by three main communities: the Italians, the Slovenes, and the Jews. The first two despised one another, while the Jews, largely middle-class and assimilated to the cultures of their neighbors, tried to maintain good relations with both the Italians and Slovenes. The Austro-Hungarian political system encompassed an overabundance of competing nations but managed to balance their competing claims. “The Monarchy [was] mighty,” Drndić writes; it extended hundreds of miles from the German-speaking west to the Carpathian east, from the Czech north to the Dalmatian south.

Before World War I, Trieste was ruled by Germans and Hungarians; afterward, it was annexed by Italy. In 1919, as Drndić notes, its southerly rival—

**Trieste**  
by Daša Drndić  
Mariner Books, 368 pp., \$15.95



Daša Drndić

Fiume in Italian and Rijeka in Slavic—was the scene of a comic-opera coup by a flamboyant writer-adventurer, Gabriele D’Annunzio. Trieste, remaining under the sovereignty of Italy, was swept by the new fascist mass movement in 1920. Drndić likens the arrival of fascism to “rats pouring out of the Trieste sewers.” Fascist personnel persecuted Slovenes, invaded the surrounding villages, and beat and stripped those of all ethnicities who were identified as peasants and leftist activists. By 1922, Benito Mussolini and his thugs had assumed supreme power.

Nevertheless, multiple cultural identities persisted in the region. Drndić’s narrative ranges to the town of Gorizia (in Italian, Gorica in Slavic). Her protagonist, Haya Tedeschi, of Italian Jewish origin, is born in 1923 and spends most of the novel attempting, in the first decade of the 21st century,

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to assemble the truth about her life. Her dignity, and that of her fellow Jews, had been fractured unalterably by the descent upon the population, during World War II, of Germany's National Socialism, feral cousin of Italian Fascism and monstrous reanimation of the Habsburg bureaucratic mentality.

In this regard, by providing a memorial to Jews and others murdered and exploited by the Nazis in Trieste yet ignored by most later commentators, Drndić has done a considerable service to the world. And as she makes clear, the worst horror of Nazi domi-

are—and they return, through Venice, to Trieste.

*Trieste* includes many things that may surprise the most assiduous readers of the Holocaust canon. Heinrich Himmler, leader of the SS and despairing over the sexual deprivations of Aryan troops, commissioned the production (according to Drndić) of an inflatable “disinfected rubber doll in natural size.” Intended to prevent German soldiers from relationships, however brutal and brief, with local women who were typically Slavic or Jewish, the doll goes out of production, leaving only a

accused, among other things, of sending a sister of Sigmund Freud to her death after persuading her that she would be returned to Vienna through the phony train station.

Railroads are the focus of another disturbing revelation in *Trieste*. When the Germans sent trainloads of captives to the camps, and the Brenner Pass through annexed Austria was closed by a heavy snowfall, the Nazis secured the cooperation of neutral Switzerland in dispatching freight trains filled with Jews and Gypsies through the Gotthard Pass. Swiss citizens, mobilized by the Red Cross, distributed soup to the condemned when the trains stopped in Zurich. This gruesome pantomime was repeated up to a dozen times, and the Swiss Red Cross, Drndić writes, “behaved . . . as if it were the savior, as if [it] saved all those people.”

But of course, they were not saved, and Drndić follows her seven-page account of this episode with a bare, 43-page list of 9,000 Jews killed in Italy or its occupied territories during the Holocaust.

Like other writers on the atrocities of Nazism—such as the 2002 Nobel laureate Imre Kertész, who survived Auschwitz and whom Drndić evokes—the Croatian novelist is compelled to reveal everything she can. *Trieste* is especially valuable for its description of an obscure death camp at San Sabba, a suburb of Trieste, where 150 people were killed daily during 1943-45, totaling as many as 5,000 Italians, Slovenes, Croats, Jews, Gypsies, antifascist partisans, and others. Drndić's recounting of the crimes at San Sabba is veridical, drawn from a 1976 trial of SS guards conducted in Trieste.

As *Trieste* continues, its point of view shifts from that of Haya Tedeschi to that of her son by Kurt Franz, a boy handed off to a German mother and given the name Hans Traube. But to disclose more here would be unfair, because no summary of *Trieste* can do justice to the extremity and extent of the evil it describes. This is an angry, eloquent, disquieting novel that should become an indispensable model for chroniclers to come. ♦



*The harbor at Trieste*

nation was its unpredictability, arbitrariness, and tendency to masquerade as a normal, if harsh, form of military occupation. Because of the cruelties imposed on the Jews of Gorizia and Trieste, Haya Tedeschi loses all trace of her family's background. Documents and photographs are missing, people she knew have been killed in bombings, deported to death camps, or committed suicide, and some have accepted baptism as a means (although uncertain) of saving their lives.

Survival assumes many forms of behavior in Nazi-occupied Trieste. Haya flees with her family down the Adriatic to the city of Vlora in Albania, which is an Italian possession but free of German anti-Jewish propaganda. At first the family are not classified as refugees in Albania, but then they

single prototype at the end of the war. This detail reminds one of Germany's advanced technology in rocketry and jet aircraft and the strange capacity of Hitlerism to anticipate things we see around us today.

Still, German officers formed alliances with Jewish and Slavic women, and Haya becomes the lover of a handsome SS officer, Kurt Franz—a real person, depicted in photographs included here. Franz was a guard at Treblinka whose task was to run a fake railroad station intended to convince deportees that the site was a normal village in German hands. In 1945, Franz was captured by American soldiers, but he escaped. He was arrested in Düsseldorf in 1959, charged with individual and mass killings, and sentenced to life imprisonment. He was

# Strange Bedfellows

*Human-android love is a nonstarter. Period.*

BY JOE QUEENAN

In the uplifting, if somewhat confusing, film *Tomorrowland*, George Clooney plays a brilliant scientist who suffers from a broken heart. Long ago and far way, he fell in love with a girl named Athena when they were children. Athena was smart and spunky and seemed genuinely to like George Clooney as a boy. But over the next four decades, the relationship never went anywhere: It never developed, it never evolved, they did not live happily ever after. Not even close.

The reason that their romance bites the dust is that Athena is an android, and androids never get any older. It is not that Athena doesn't have feelings for George Clooney as a boy; as I said, she seems genuinely to like the child George—even though it is immediately clear to all but the dimmest moviegoers that Athena is way out of his weight class. So the relationship simply dies. It's not a question of liking or disliking one another; it's just that, well, romances between male humans and female androids do not pan out. At least not onscreen.

A similar dynamic is at work in the recent film *Ex Machina*. Here, a geeky programmer named Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson) falls in love with a female android named Ava (Alicia Vikander). The android, seeking to escape from the wilderness research facility in which she is confined by a mad scientist (Oscar Isaac), seems to like Caleb well enough. But as was the case in *Tomorrowland*, things do not work out. Caleb will learn, to his great disappointment, that Ava, a conscienceless android, is only playing him, manipulating his feelings so that he will help her escape from the weird

secluded laboratory in which she has been imprisoned while the mad scientist perfects her. The dork learns, ruefully, that he is only a pawn in her game, just as she had previously been a pawn in the scientist's game.

Once again, the message is crystal clear: Humans and androids don't mix.

The exact same thing occurs in 2013's *Her*, where a lonely geek played by Joaquin Phoenix falls in love with the perky operating system on his computer. Samantha is smart, she is funny, she has a silky, sexy voice, she can simulate orgasms, and she is always on call. But one day, he finds out that she is carrying on similar "affairs" with thousands and thousands of other men. Samantha sees nothing wrong in this; she is an operating system, not flesh and blood. Disconsolate, he says goodbye to the love of his life forever—and thus another *anthropelectro* romance goes down in flames.

People are always saying that Hollywood is sexist and does not respect women, but these three films suggest otherwise. What these films seem to be saying is that men who actually *prefer* to have relationships with androids rather than real women will ultimately pay dearly for their misogyny and stupidity.

The subject is hardly new: Men have been pursuing doomed romantic relationships with female machines since the early days of cinema. Female robots figure prominently in *Metropolis* (1927), *Blade Runner* (1982), and even *Austin Powers* (1997). Of course, the great-granddaddy of current films in this genre is *The Stepford Wives*, Bryan Forbes's grim 1975 parable about men who replace their wives with comely cyborgs who are perfect replicas of their spouses. Their murdered spouses.

But a key difference exists in recent

films about the distaff brand of the artificially intelligent. In *Tomorrowland*, *Ex Machina*, and *Her*, men are not smitten by robots who remind them of somebody else: They fall in love with the androids themselves. They accept the robots on their own terms. They *prefer* these robots (or operating devices) to the women they know. They may not realize this at the beginning, but they will realize it by the end.

This is why their virtually identical fates are so meaningful. In this trio of films, Hollywood warns men to *forget* about having romantic relationships with female androids because things will go south in a hurry. An android will not stand by your side when you are dying of some horrible disease. An android will not be faithful to you because of adamant social mores. And an android will only laugh at your stupid jokes because it has been programmed to pretend that it finds you amusing. In reality, it thinks you're a dope. Left to its own devices, it would rather play backgammon or learn Sanskrit. It doesn't need you. It doesn't even like you.

This is what makes the messages of these films so poignant. *Real men don't marry androids*. Real men don't even want to date androids. Real men want to be with real women, or with real men, or with real transgenders. Real men don't want to sleep with an operating system, no matter how good it is at simulating an orgasm. That stuff gets tired in a hurry. As *Her* and *Ex Machina* and *Tomorrowland* make clear, the only guys who want to date androids are dorks and schlemiels and losers who couldn't get dates with real women. Real men also understand that falling in love with a teenaged android is eventually going to get a guy in trouble, because the human will one day stop being a minor, but the android will remain jailbait forever.

In short, Hollywood is sending out the unmistakable message that other human beings make much better partners than androids, robots, operating systems, Siri-like devices—at least at the present moment. Admittedly, this is not the most enlightened view of the relationship between men and women. But it is certainly a step in the right direction. ♦

Joe Queenan is the author, most recently, of *One for the Books*.

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### MOE FIDEN, Founder and President

Moe Fiden has long been a passionate supporter of Vice President Joe Biden, perhaps in large part because the two have so much in common. Moe was born in the heart of coal country, Scranton, PA (just like Joe!), and grew up in the idyllic town of Wilmington, Delaware. Rarely seen among the Georgetown cocktail party set, Moe, like Joe, is a true champion of the people, riding the Amtrak home each week and gabbin' with everyone he meets. He and the Vice President have so much in common, people have even told him that he looks like the Veep (Moe says, "Malarkey!"). When people ask him, "Why Joe Biden?" he says, "Why not?!" According to Moe, even after 42 years of marriage Joe Biden's wife still thinks Joe is sexier than Tom Selleck—so he must be doin' something right!

Contact: [jbidenVP69@hotmail.com](mailto:jbidenVP69@hotmail.com)

### JOAN MIDEN, Director of Public Relations

Joan Miden has known the Vice President for decades and, like Moe Fiden, is a native of the mountains of central



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